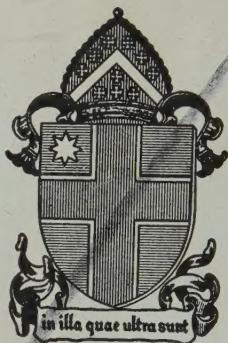


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OUR BOUNDEN DUTY

BY

CHARLES H. ROBINSON, D.D.

HON. CANON OF RIPON, AND EDITORIAL SECRETARY OF THE S.P.G.

"It is very meet, right, and *our bounden duty* that we should, at all times and in all places, give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God."

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P R E F A C E.

THE sermons and addresses contained in this book were for the most part delivered in cathedral churches in England, Canada, India, and Australia. The one which gives a title to the volume was preached before the University of Cambridge, and that on Memory was preached to soldiers in the Royal Military Barracks, St. James's Park. In some instances they have been partially rewritten in view of their publication. The first two contain several thoughts which are worked out at greater length in "Studies in Worship".

The majority of the sermons deal with subjects which are connected with the approaching season of Lent.

CHARLES H. ROBINSON.

January, 1912.

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THE DUTY OF PRAISE

THE DUTY OF PRAISE.¹

ON a font which bears the date 1537, and which is erected in a Norfolk church,² are inscribed the words "Think and thank God".

Possibly the unknown craftsman by whom they were inscribed intended to draw attention to the reasons for giving God thanks which those had who had been made members of the Christian Church by baptism, or the words may have been intended to attract the attention of those who entered the church door for the purpose of uniting in a common act of worship. Whatever may have been the author's intention, it would be hard to find an exhortation which, if interpreted in its widest sense, expresses in so short a compass one of the greatest needs of the present day.

The first Anglican bishop in Central Africa, who had been a fellow of his college in this University, said that it was the repetition of the General Thanksgiving contained in the Book of

¹ *Preached before the University of Cambridge.*

² The parish church of Walpole, S. Peter.

Common Prayer in his college chapel which had influenced him for good "more than any other earthly means".¹ Many of those who make daily use of the Anglican liturgy could endorse the words of Bishop Mackenzie. It is to be regretted that those responsible for the conduct of Anglican services, whether in college chapels or in churches, frequently omit the General Thanksgiving when, for one reason or another, they desire to shorten the Morning or Evening Prayer, as it is appointed to be said.

It will help us to appreciate the duty of offering praise to God if we consider the attitude of some of the oldest non-Christian religions towards this duty, and then try to see how the subject is treated in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Let us first make clear to ourselves the sense in which the word praise is usually employed. Praise is distinguished from thanksgiving, for whilst thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude for benefits which have been received, praise is the recognition by one intelligent being of the excellence or worth of another intelligent being. Inanimate nature cannot be said to praise its maker, except in so far as its praise finds expression at the hands of a mediator or interpreter.

¹"Memoir of Bishop Mackenzie," by Harvey Goodwin, p. 200.

It may help us to understand the significance of the word praise if we compare its use with that of another derivative from the same root, the word "appraise". Praise, in the strict sense of the word, can only be offered by one who is in a position to appraise the character or actions of the Being to whom the praise is ascribed. It cannot, therefore, be offered to God by a consistent agnostic, nor can it be offered by one who believes that God is but an extension of himself, or that God and the universe, of which he himself forms a part, are identical. The intelligent ascription of praise to an unknown god is impossible. It is true that the man who is overcome with the thought of God's infinity may be inclined to say :—

God Whom I praise, how could I praise
If such as I might understand ?¹

but the tribute which he offers, though it be one of reverential awe, is not, in a true sense, an offering of praise.

So, too, the consistent fatalist cannot offer true praise to God. This can only be offered by the man who feels that he is giving that which he is free to withhold, and who believes that he is able, if he so choose, to thwart the will of God,

¹ Browning, "Johannes Agricola in Meditation".

But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise or prayer.¹

If we include in our definition of praise the ascription of moral attributes or moral virtues to the being to whom praise is offered it would be hard to find many instances of praise outside the limits of Christian or Jewish literature. We can find instances in which power and vengeance, and even condescension, and willingness to overlook evil, are ascribed to the gods, but in the passage which might be quoted there is little or no attempt to base the ascription of praise upon the possession of any moral qualities such as would be regarded as deserving of praise in the case of human beings. Human weaknesses and human jealousies are often ascribed to the gods, but the possession of human virtues is seldom regarded as a reason for offering praise.

The religious writings with which some of the Israelites would have been familiar were those of the Chaldæans and Egyptians. The former included many penitential psalms, but nothing which resembles the Israelitish psalms of praise. The nearest approach to one of these psalms is perhaps afforded by an Egyptian hymn addressed to Amon Ra, which reads :—

¹ Browning, "Christmas Eve".

Hail to thee, author of all things, the one, the sole one, whose arms are many, who though he rests yet watches over men : who though he rests, yet seeks after the good of all animals.¹

The worship of Amon was, however, so tinged with pantheism, and the ascriptions of praise are so inseparable from supplications for material boons, that they afford ground for contrast, rather than for comparison with the Hebrew psalms.

As far as the actual form of language is concerned, the nearest approaches to the ascriptions of praise to be found in the Hebrew psalms occur in the writings of the Hindus, but in interpreting these we have, even more than in the case of the early Egyptian writings, to bear in mind the pantheistic trend of thought which was latent in the mind of the writer, and which often gives to his words a meaning far removed from that which they would possess if used by a theist or a Christian. In the case, however, of the Sikhs, the Kabir Panth, and other more recent Hindu sects, the personality of the Supreme Being is implicitly, and at times explicitly, recognised, and ascriptions of praise to God are found in their sacred books which can be compared with those found in Hebrew and Christian writings. Thus, Nanak,

¹ See "The Old Egyptian Faith," by Professor E. Naville, p. 143.

the founder of the Sikh religion (who was born in 1469), after telling how a perpetual music rises to God from all kinds of beings, wrote :—

One sings His beautiful qualities and greatness,
Another sings a difficult thought of science,
The story is told by crores, crores, crores.¹

To pass on to consider the attitude of the ancient Hebrews in regard to the duty of offering praise to God,—there is an ancient Jewish tradition, recorded by Philo, which represents the attitude of the more thoughtful Jews of his time. According to this tradition, after the creation of this world and before the appearance of man upon it, God asked the angels what they thought of the work of His hands. Their reply was that but one thing was wanting in so vast and perfect a world, *viz.*, that there should be created a clear, mighty, harmonious voice, which should fill all quarters of the globe incessantly with the sound of thanksgiving and praise addressed to the Maker of it and of all things. The answer to this suggestion and the fulfilment of this need were contained in the creation of man which immediately followed. Man was created, according to the Jewish tradition, in order that he might serve as the mouthpiece of all creation and spend

¹ Japji, strophe 3, translated by Dr. Trumpf. The Indian word crore is equivalent to ten millions.

his time in offering up thanksgiving and praise to the maker of all.

This interpretation of the meaning of human existence finds expression in the words of George Herbert, who wrote :—

Man is the world's high priest ! He doth present
The Sacrifice for all ; while they below
Unto the service mutter an assent,
Such as springs use that fall, and winds that blow !
He that to praise and laud Thee doth refrain,
Doth not refrain unto himself alone,
But robs a thousand who would praise Thee fain,
And doth commit a world of sin in one.

The Jewish tradition recorded by Philo helps us to interpret the scene described by the Christian seer who wrote :—

“ Every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, ‘ Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion for ever and ever ’.”¹

The religion of the Israelites was distinguished from that of other nations by the emphasis which it laid upon the duty of praise and thanksgiving. It would be little exaggeration to say that while

¹ Rev. v. 13, R.V.

the chief object which other worshippers had in view was to propitiate their gods, the object which the Jewish worshipper set before him, during the time when the later books of the Old Testament were being written, was to offer to his God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. We realise the truth of this statement when we compare the Hebrew Psalter, which became the Jewish manual of devotion, with the religious books which have come down to us from Egypt, Assyria, India, and China. In the writings contained in the Old Testament it is possible to trace a gradual development of the recognition of an obligation to praise God. No exhortation to praise God occurs in the writings of the Prophets during the eighth century, that is in Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, or in the first part of Isaiah. The writings during the seventh century recognise the duty of thanksgiving and contain one or two exhortations to praise God. Thus the writer of the book of Deuteronomy represents Moses as saying at the end of a long series of curses : "All these curses shall come upon thee . . . because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart by reason of the abundance of all things".¹

Jeremiah in a single passage says : "Sing unto

¹ Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

the Lord, praise ye the Lord". The words follow immediately upon his declaration that his enemies should be ashamed with everlasting dishonour.¹

A similar ascription of praise to God in view of deliverance from public or private enemies is found at a much earlier period in the songs ascribed to Moses, Deborah, and Hannah; but the praise offered is rather of the nature of thanksgiving for benefits received than an act of worship and adoration in recognition of the moral qualities of God.

Ezekiel, who wrote early in the sixth century (593-576) contains no teaching in regard to the duty of praise.

The first clear recognition of the obligation to praise God is contained in the latter portion of Isaiah written perhaps late in the sixth century (*circa* 538).

Here we read "Sing unto the Lord a new song and his praise from the end of the earth, let them give glory unto the Lord and declare his praise in the islands".² Again, in the following chapter, the writer, speaking in the name of God, describes Israel as "the people which I formed for myself that they might set forth my praise".³

In the fifth century we have recorded the

¹ Jer. xx. 13.

² Is. xlii. 10, 12.

³ Is. xliii. 21.

thankofferings connected with the Levitical worship, and later still, when the Temple worship had been developed, we read in Nehemiah : " Then the Levites said . . . Stand up and bless the Lord your God . . . Blessed be Thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing and praise ".¹

The prophet Joel, after speaking of the uselessness of mere ritual worship, says : " Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving ".²

The author of the historical portion of the book of Daniel regards the recognition of the duty of praise as the final test of human character in the case of a heathen no less than in that of a Jew. According to the account which he gives of the condemnation of Belshazzar, Daniel, after bringing against the king charges of pride and sacrilege, pronounces his condemnation in the words : " the God in whose hand thy breath is and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified ".³

In the case of the Hebrew Psalter which is distinguished from all other religious books which have been written by the forms of praise which it embodies, we note that it is the psalms which express the highest aspirations of praise which form its latest additions.

The obligation to offer praise to God is set

¹ Is. ix. 5, xii. 46.

² Is. iv. 5.

³ Dan. v. 23.

forth with increasing emphasis as we come down to the time when the books which form the Apocrypha were written. In the Song of the Three Children we read the words which form part of our Christian worship to-day, "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all for ever".¹

In Ecclesiasticus we read "Sing a song of praise, bless the Lord in all His works".²

The worship of the Jewish synagogue from the earliest period of which we have a record, began with an ascription of praise and thanksgiving. The duty of reading the prescribed form was assigned to the one who was afterwards to read the portion from the Prophets. If, as is probable, the form which has come down to us is as old as the time of Christ, we may assume that on the memorable day in the synagogue at Nazareth, when He was invited to act as reader, He would have begun the Service by offering up the following ascription of praise.

"Blessed be Thou, O Lord, King of the world, Who formedst the light and createdst everything : Who in mercy givest light to the earth and to those who dwell upon it : and in Thy goodness day by day and every day renewest the works of creation. Blessed be the Lord our God for the

¹ v. 35.

² xxxix. 14.

glory of His handiwork and for light-giving lights which He has made for His praise! Blessed be the Lord our God Who has formed the lights! With great love hast Thou loved us, O Lord our God, and with much overflowing pity hast Thou pitied us, our Father and our King.”¹

The absence from the recorded teaching of Christ of direct exhortation to praise God is perhaps to be explained by the fact that the duty of praise was clearly recognised in the worship of the Synagogue. His words, spoken on the return of a Samaritan leper whom He had healed, suggest how deeply He was moved by the sin of ingratitude towards God.

In the writings of S. Paul exhortations to praise and thank God have a prominent place. He regarded ingratitude as a sin to be classed with the worst that he could name. Thus in his letter to the Christians at Rome, when referring to the responsibility which attached to heathen peoples who had had no opportunities for learning the will of God as it had been revealed to the Jews, he said: “They are without excuse, because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful”. He then goes on to say how as a

¹ Cf. Edersheim: “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,” vol. i. p. 439.

result, they were given up to vile affections and were filled with all unrighteousness. His words imply that he regarded ingratitude as a sin not only when displayed by Christians, but when displayed by those to whom the supreme illustration of God's love had not been given.

Throughout the whole of S. Paul's teaching we come across frequent references to the duty of praise and thanksgiving. Thus in the first of the Epistles written to the Christians at Thessalonica he writes ; " In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you ". In his other epistles he continually prays that their readers may abound with thanksgiving and may give thanks always for all things.

The teaching of the New Testament culminates in the description of the acts of praise and thanksgiving described in the Apocalypse. The writer of the Apocalypse sees, as he tells us, a door open in Heaven. He catches a glimpse of its occupations, which as far as we can interpret his language, consist of the ceaseless offering of praise and adoration. The " living creatures " have no rest, day and night, saying : " Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty," and the four and twenty elders—representatives apparently of the human race—take up the strain, saying : " Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God,

to receive the glory and the honour and the power ; for thou didst create all things," a strain which passes into the new song of redemption, in which the unnumbered multitude joins. Human language is evidently inadequate to describe that which the writer sees. He can but speak of the "loud voices" and of the unending song expressing passionate love and self-surrender and adoring gratitude and praise.

One of the lessons which the book suggests is that the atmosphere of Heaven is an atmosphere of praise, and that those will be able to approach nearest to the Divine Presence who have learnt to breathe this atmosphere.

As an illustration of the importance which the Christians of the second century attached to the duty of praise, we may take a passage which occurs in the *Apology of Aristides*. He says, speaking of the Christians of his time : "Every morning and at all hours, on account of the goodness of God toward them, they praise and laud Him, and over their food and over their drink they render Him thanks. And if any righteous person of their number passes away from the world, they rejoice and give thanks to God, and they follow his body, as if he were moving from one place to another. And when a child is born to any one of them, they praise God ; and if,

again, it chance to die in its infancy, they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. Such is the ordinance of the laws of the Christians, O king, and such their conduct."

This high ideal which Aristides attributes to the Christians of his time was to a large extent lost sight of during the centuries which followed.

It might have been expected that the perpetual repetition of the central act of the Church's worship, to which was given the name Eucharist (thanksgiving), would have availed to impress upon Christians the obligation to make their whole lives an act of continuous praise, but the exclusive stress which was often laid upon the sacrificial aspects of this Service, and upon its expiatory character, and the long controversies which arose in regard to its interpretation, helped to obscure its significance as a corporate act of praise and thanksgiving.

One magnificent hymn of praise, now incorporated in our Anglican liturgy, has come down to us from the fourth or fifth century. The *Te Deum*, which has been in use for nearly fifteen hundred years, is a hymn of praise which belongs especially to the Western branches of the Christian Church. It begins by reminding us of the worship of heaven and of the ceaseless praise

addressed by apostles, prophets and martyrs to the Three Persons in the Trinity. It then recalls various facts connected with the redemption of mankind for which praise is due to Christ, to Whom the prayer of the Church is addressed. Then follows a burst of adoring praise: "Day by day we magnify Thee, and we worship Thy name ever world without end". It finishes with the expression of confidence, "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted, let me never," or, as it should be translated, "I shall never, be confounded".

In the Exhortation which forms the introduction to Matins and Evensong in our Anglican liturgy, we are reminded that two of the objects for which we are invited to assemble and meet together in God's house are "to render thanks for the great benefits received at His hands," and to "set forth His most worthy praise".

The Psalms and other forms of praise included in our liturgy contain many expressions of confident hope and trust which, as individuals, we could not have framed for ourselves, and which we should hardly dare to use had they not been sanctioned by the authority of Holy Scripture, or by the experience of our fellow-Christians in the past. But as we try humbly and reverently to repeat the accustomed forms, we catch something of the inspiration which breathes in them,

and though our hearts be cold and our imagination dull, God accepts the sacrifice of our lips.

One chief reason why we cannot afford to neglect attendance at public worship is that the effort to enter into the spirit of our liturgy will help us to acquire a habit of praise and thanksgiving.

Praise and thanksgiving are closely connected : the one leads up to and passes into the other. He who finds it difficult to praise God will be wise therefore to begin by cultivating more assiduously the habit of thanksgiving. He will be wise to adopt S. Paul's advice and never ask God for anything without at the same time thanking Him for what He has already given.

The connection which exists between the habit of thanksgiving and the development of character is expressed in a sentence written by an eighteenth century writer. "Would you know," said Law, in his "Serious Call," "who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most : it is not he who gives most alms or is most eminent in temperance, chastity, and justice ; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it." ¹

¹ Chap.

If we may quote once again from our Anglican liturgy, the practical outcome of the subject which we have tried to consider is expressed for us in the familiar words : “ It is very meet, right, and *our bounden duty* that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God ”.

THE MEANING AND OBLIGATION OF PUBLIC
WORSHIP

THE MEANING AND OBLIGATION OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.¹

ARE we justified in asking any one to come to church who is not naturally impelled to do so? The answer which many a man is inclined to make, when invited to attend, is: "Why should I go to church when I can serve God with more profit to myself in my own house? I can read my Bible and say my prayers with less distraction at home. I can read there a better sermon out of a printed book than I shall hear if I go to church. Why then, should I put myself to trouble and inconvenience by going out?"

The answer which may be given to these questions will become clearer if we inquire what answer a Jew would have made if such questions had been presented to him in olden time. The opening verses of the 122nd Psalm suggest the answer which he would probably have made. The Psalm is a pilgrim song intended apparently to be sung by those who were

¹ *Preached at S. Paul's Cathedral, London, and at Winnipeg pro-cathedral, Canada.*

on their way up to God's house in Jerusalem. In order to attend the temple worship in Jerusalem many of the Jews had to travel fifty or even a hundred miles through a country where travelling was always difficult and often dangerous. Had one of these Jewish pilgrims been asked to say what it was which was bringing him up to Jerusalem, his answer might have been expressed in the language of this psalm, the writer of which, speaking of the objects which pilgrims had in view as they journeyed up to Jerusalem, says : " Thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, for a testimony unto Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord ". Two reasons are here alleged for attendance at the temple services, the first of which is expressed in the words, " for a testimony unto Israel," or, as the Prayer Book version of the Psalms translates it, " to testify unto Israel ". The writer of this psalm considered that one of the objects for which his fellow-countrymen attended God's house was to make a public acknowledgment to those amongst whom they lived that they desired to serve God. The individual Israelite might seldom speak to his neighbours on the subject of religion, but his leaving his own home and journeying up to Jerusalem would be to them a silent testimony that he desired to serve God.

Following out this thought for ourselves, we may say that a first answer to the question, Why ought we to go to church on Sunday? is that by doing so we testify to those around us that we desire to serve God. It may be urged that a man is under no obligation to let any one else know whether he desires to serve God or no, and that he is justified in keeping his religion to himself. There is a measure of truth which lies behind this plea, but before a man ventures to adopt it as his own he needs to remember the emphatic condemnation which Christ pronounced upon those who shirked making an open confession of discipleship when he said: "Every one who shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God; but he that denieth Me in the presence of men shall be denied in the presence of the angels of God". The tendency to-day is all too much in the direction of regarding religion from the individualistic standpoint and of trying to make religion a secret matter. The boy was expressing the opinion of many older than himself when he said to his mother: "I should like to be a Christian just such as father is, for no one can tell whether he is a Christian or no". If the cross that was marked upon our foreheads when we were baptized were only visible, some

would wear their hats very low. They would be ashamed to have it known that they had been dedicated to the service of Christ, to be His faithful soldiers and servants unto their life's end. The clock attached to a certain church, which possessed neither face nor hands, but which was wound up by the sexton on Sundays and continued to tick year after year, affords an apt illustration of the religion which many are content to possess. The movements of the clock were as regular and accurate as any one could desire, but, inasmuch as it kept the time to itself, no one was the better for its existence.

There are many who are too diffident to speak to others on the subject of religion, but who are not ashamed that others should know that they are God-fearing men. To these attendance at church Services affords a means of testifying to the reality of that which they value more than they can easily express, but which as individuals they shrink from confessing. It is true that the man who stays at home when it is possible for him to come to church can read his Bible and say his prayers at home and that he can read a better sermon out of a printed book than he is likely to hear if he go to church ; but by doing so, by keeping his religion to himself and refusing to give himself the trouble of attending public

worship he is putting away from him the opportunity to acknowledge God in the presence of others, the opportunity which the Psalmist of old valued so highly.

The second reason which the Psalmist gave for going to God's house was "to give thanks unto the name of the Lord". In considering how far this second reason is applicable to modern times we may notice the prominent place which is assigned to praise and thanksgiving in the introductory exhortation which is attached to the morning and evening Services in the Book of Common Prayer. After explaining that confession of sin must form part of private and public devotion, it reminds worshippers that the objects for which they assemble and meet together are first to render thanks for the great benefits received at God's hands; secondly, to set forth His most holy praise; thirdly, to hear His most holy Word; and lastly, to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul. The order suggests that the first duty of the worshipper is to praise God and to thank Him for what He is and for what He has done; his next to gain a fuller knowledge of what He is from the study of Holy Scripture, and the last to secure benefits for others and for himself in answer to his prayers.

Failure to understand the relative importance of the objects here stated accounts for much of the dissatisfaction felt by many who attend church but obtain little help from doing so. Any one who joins a crowd of people who are going out of church on a Sunday night, may hear one and another remark to his neighbour: "I am sorry that I came to church to-night, the sermon was dull, the singing was poor, and the congregation was very small; I might just as well have stayed at home; I am sorry that I came to church". Why is it that such an one is going away from church disappointed? Surely the reason is not far to seek. It is because he came to church from a wrong motive. He came, not to render praise and thanksgiving to God, but to secure a private benefit for himself. He who comes to church with the object which the Psalmist had in view when he went up to God's house in Jerusalem can never go away from church disappointed. The sermon may be uninteresting, or there may be none at all, but he did not come to church to hear any special person speak; the singing may be poor, but he did not come to church for the sake of the music; there may be very few people in church, or scarcely any one beside himself, but he did not come to church to count his fellow-worshippers. He came to church to praise and

render thanks to God, and if he go away from church disappointed, that is, if he go away without having done that which he came to do, the fault attaches not to others but to himself.

The prospects of religion in this country depend to a large extent upon the development of habits of worship. It is not likely that in the near future the music in our churches will become better than it now is, or that the average sermon will become more edifying. Happily, however, the development of religion in our midst does not to any great extent depend upon the fulfilment of these conditions. What it does depend upon is an increased realisation of the fact that Christianity is not a means of getting good for ourselves, but of going out of ourselves whilst we offer as a sacrifice to God the homage of our lips and of our hearts. The duty of cultivating a spirit of praise and thanksgiving is at least as great as is the duty of learning to pray. To most men who possess any kind of religious faith prayer is a natural exercise, but how different is it as regards thanksgiving? If the question were asked in any assembly of professing Christians, Do you pray to God every day? there would be few who could not answer, "Yes"; but if the question asked were, Do you thank and praise God every day? how much more limited would be the response.

Because the cultivation of a spirit of praise and thanksgiving by the individual Christian is a task of so great difficulty, he does well to prize the opportunities which are offered to him to acquire this spirit by acts of common worship. In the exhortation at the beginning of morning and evening prayer the worshipper is invited to render thanks to God and to set forth His most holy praise. Praise is distinguished from thanksgiving, for whilst thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude for benefits received, praise is an act of worship or adoration of God in recognition of what He is. The Prayer Book is more full of praise than of thanksgiving. The reason of this may perhaps be that as praise is the higher and more difficult act of the two, the Anglican Church has afforded more help in giving expression to it than to thanksgiving. The worshipper who enters into the spirit of the Prayer Book will learn to value the help which is afforded him by the words and expressions which are put into his mouth, such as those contained in the "Te Deum," the "Benedicite," the "Magnificat," and in many of the Psalms. It is easy for him to frame forms of prayer for himself to express the nature of his wants, but most men lack the imagination to find fitting words in which to offer up to God their praise and adoration. For this reason we

may be grateful for those forms of praise which we are invited to repeat day by day, and which have been sanctified by the devotions of unnumbered worshippers who have gone before us. As we could not have thought of such words for ourselves, so we should scarcely dare to use them had they not been sanctified by the authority of Holy Scripture or by the experience of our fellow-Christians in the past. But as we try, humbly and reverently, to repeat the accustomed forms, we catch something of the inspiration which breathes in them, and though our hearts be cold and our imaginations dull, we may believe that God will accept the sacrifice of our lips.

In the words of the General Thanksgiving the worshipper is invited to thank and praise God for all that He has done, both for himself and for others, and to pray that he and his fellow-worshippers may show forth His praise, not only with their lips, but in their lives.

Those who attend the services of the Anglican Church are invited to offer up to God a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which in almost the same form has been offered up by countless thousands of the noblest men and women who have ever lived, by saints, heroes, and martyrs of the past; a service which, in the very same words, is being offered up by our fellow-country-

men and others in every part of the world. As the worshipper repeats the prayers and praises of the Anglican liturgy, hallowed as they are by the devotion of those who have lived and died with these words continually on their lips, he may feel that he is united in something more than thought to all the members of Christ's Church, alike of the present and the past. The Service of Matins is intended to lead up to, and to prepare the worshipper to take part in, the Church's great act of praise and thanksgiving, which was beautifully called by the early Christians the Eucharist, that is "the Thanksgiving". A fuller recognition of this aspect of the Holy Eucharist would enable many to find in it at once an expression of adoration and the means whereby the spirit of praise and thanksgiving might inspire their daily lives.

One of the chief objects for which we assemble and meet together in God's house is that we may breathe for awhile the atmosphere of praise which will be the atmosphere of the life that awaits us hereafter.

He to whom the effort to breathe this atmosphere now is irksome can have no reason to suppose that he will be able or will have the desire to live in this atmosphere in the life to come. But, on the other hand, he who embraces in the

spirit of the ancient Psalmist the opportunities for public worship that are placed within his reach, in order that others may know that he is a disciple of Jesus Christ, and in order that he may offer to God, in union with his fellow-Christians, a more acceptable sacrifice of praise than he can offer as an individual worshipper, will find that the habit of common worship which he acquires here will be to him the preparation for the common worship of God hereafter.

THE PERMANENCE OF HUMAN CHARACTER

THE PERMANENCE OF HUMAN CHARACTER.¹

How many things there are that require to be completed in order to be understood! An unfinished story, a half-painted picture, a partially worked problem, how unsatisfactory is the impression which they produce! We feel that we must understand the whole in order to understand the smallest part of that whole. And if this be the case in reference to other subjects of study, how much more is it so in regard to the meaning and interpretation of human life. He who would understand the significance of the years which he is now spending, and estimate aright the importance of the units of time and action of which his life is composed, must go forward in imagination and look back upon them from their close, from which alone they can be viewed as parts of a connected whole.

The dweller by the seashore, who desires to understand the relative height and extent of the hills and plains, amongst which his life has been

¹ *Preached in Westminster Abbey, and in Bathurst Cathedral, New South Wales.*

spent, cannot attain his purpose by any minute examination of their surfaces, or by any study, however prolonged, of the nature of their soil and composition. Let him, however, leave the coast and sail out on the sea before him, and how different do the conditions of the problem become ! As the ship increases its distance from the shore and the eye is enabled to take in more and more of the scene from which he is receding, the relative heights of the hills and mountains are gradually revealed. The hill on which he had lived, and which, owing to its nearness, had seemed to him larger than others at a distance, is now reduced to its right proportion, and as he gazes upon the extending outline he is in a position to understand that which years of study upon the spot could not have revealed.

The circumstances connected with the life of every individual are analogous to those of the dweller by the sea coast. It is a universal experience that those things which are nearest to a man's sight or touch tend to appear of most importance, whilst others which exceed them in value and significance are of less concern owing to the distance to which they are removed from him. And—to carry on the thought suggested by the illustration—he can never understand the relative significance and importance of the varied

details of his life until he is separated from the scene of his present action and, leaving the shores of time behind him, has got far enough out upon the sea of eternity to enable him to view the details of his life in their true proportion.

Let us try, as far as our imagination will allow, to place ourselves for awhile in such a position, and by attempting to gain a retrospective view of our life to realise what actions or what sections of our present life will seem to us of most importance when, as will soon be the actual case, we come to look back upon them from this point of view.

It will help us to attain our purpose if we consider in detail two or three typical lives. Take for example the life of the merchant, the shop-keeper, or the modern man of business. What is there in such a life, full of transient cares and excitements, which will appear to be of permanent significance when looked back on from its close? Much which now interests will then interest no more; the excitement of speculation and competition will have passed completely away; the money gained or lost will seem as nothing then; much, very much, will have passed. Is there anything which will remain and which from its nature cannot pass? The answer must depend upon how far truth has been the distinguishing

characteristic of the life that has been lived. Has it been worthy of the name of real life? Then indeed there is much which remains and of which death cannot rob its possessor.

"Business life, it has been said, is often harsh and even merciless in its methods, but it makes much of such qualities as truth, honour, fidelity, and loyalty . . . people who are proposing to reform social morality are not infrequently deficient in certain virtues which are absolutely fundamental in commercial life . . . thus it happens that business transactions of large dimensions are determined by a word or even by a sign, and that vast systems of communication are trusted for their security to the absolute fidelity of some obscure servant ; . . . the more elaborate business becomes the more dependent it is on these moral qualities. . . . Modern business is not, as it is so often pictured, the work of a horde of pirates and wreckers watching for a chance to entrap and despoil the unwary ; it is much more like the legitimate traffic of the high seas, where there are many perils of storm and collision, and many disasters wrought by treachery or rashness, but where on the whole strong men are trained and the work of the world is bravely done."¹

¹ F. G. Peabody, "Jesus Christ and the Social Question," pp. 320, 321.

The firmness of will, the habit of self-restraint, the calmness amidst difficulty, and modesty in success, the unselfish pleasure in the prosperity of others, these, which are attributes of character, will outlast the greatest changes that can come to man's body.

But, on the other hand, has the life consisted merely of efforts to acquire riches and comforts for self and for the gratification of the physical nature ; has the money, when acquired, been valued for its own sake or for the power or influence it carries with it ; then, when these riches and comforts have passed away, how great will be the blank which they will leave behind !

Take again the life of the student. Looked back upon from the same point of view, what is there in it which will then appear to be permanent and of real importance ? Much of the knowledge which he has spent his life in acquiring will then be found to possess little interest. Many of his conclusions, which he had imagined to have been completely established, will prove to be wrong. But at the same time the results of true and honest study will then be completely discerned. The distinction between true and false learning will then be made clear. He who has studied with no higher object than that of using his knowledge for his own selfish interest, or that he may

gain the reputation of learning from those around him, will find that the advantages accruing from his study are of no longer duration than the fleeting pleasures it was intended to secure. Whilst on the other hand he who has sought knowledge for its own sake, or, rather, for God's sake ; he who has followed after truth, whether in history, in science, in philosophy, or in any region of thought, or action, in order that he may avoid that which is false and may think and do that which is true, will find at length that, though many of the details of his knowledge prove to be inaccurate, he has nevertheless gained the power to learn yet higher truth, to understand, if we may so speak, the mind of the God and Author of all truth. There is no one to whom the prospect of the future ought to be more inspiring than the man who has had the privilege of spending his lifetime in study. The future for him holds in store the solution of the problems which have baffled him here. Sir Isaac Newton described himself as engaged in picking up conspicuous pebbles on the ocean beach of undiscovered truth. The future which awaits the student on the strand which lies beyond the limits of discoverable truth and beyond the sea of time, will be determined, not by the number or size of the pebbles he has succeeded in appropriating here, but by the spirit in which his

search for them has been prosecuted. There is no one, too, whose work, if carried on in the spirit which should characterise all work, need suffer so little interruption by what is called death. The student has no cause to be impatient or to complain if his study of God, revealed in His visible works here, develops suddenly into the study of God and His works under more favourable conditions in a fuller and completer life.

He who is seeking truth, with whatever department of study he is concerned, with an honest heart and with the resolve to act it out in his life, may encourage himself with the thought that nothing can interrupt his quest, and that the day is not far distant when his study shall be carried on under more favourable conditions than any which he can hope to experience here, when he shall be in the immediate presence of Him who could say of Himself when on earth "I am the truth".

Take again the life of a nurse or a doctor. It might at first sight seem that the work in which they are engaged must necessarily be of a temporary nature. The doctor spends his life in devising remedies for bodily complaints, which will not, we believe, outlast this present life. Will it be the case then, that the whole of the labour spent by the doctor, and his predecessors, in acquiring this knowledge will be wasted and be

followed by no permanent results, or, in what is the permanence of a doctor's work to be sought? If the number of remedies he discovers, or the success with which he applies them, be taken as the criterion of the value of his life's work, the result cannot be other than discouraging. Even the ancient Jews had realised that a doctor's life had a wider outlook than the relief of physical suffering, or the attainment of visible success. Speaking of physicians, the writer of Ecclesiasticus says, God "hath given men skill that he might be honoured in his marvellous works".¹ In the case of a doctor or a nurse a self-centred life or one which is merely a successful career is a life in which its true ideal is entirely obscured. No profession demands, and none, if followed from the highest motive, evokes so much sympathy and sympathetic insight as does theirs. Constant association with the sufferings of others and the attempt to relieve them should tend to produce this, the noblest quality of human nature, in a way in which nothing else can. If, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says,² Christ "in the days of His flesh . . . learned obedience by the things which He suffered," may we not venture to say that, in the same sense of the word, He learned part of His unique sym-

¹ Ecclus. xxxviii. 6.

² Heb. v. 7, 8.

pathy from His constant association with those who were suffering. In the case of a doctor or a nurse then, the power of sympathy which their profession at once requires and develops, is one for which the future life will afford unending scope. They may feel assured that, though the special knowledge necessary for the practice of their art may one day be entirely superseded, the character which they have acquired, and which has fitted them to do the work of ministering servants here, will fit them to do the work of ministering angels hereafter.

The majority of people, however, are not merchants, or doctors, or scholars, but they are engaged in the ordinary and uneventful pursuits of daily life, which may seem to affect those around them but little whether for good or for evil. What is there in a life filled with petty cares and duties which will outlast the passing circumstances under which it is lived? As in the former instances, so here, the permanent result of the life will be proportionate to its reality. "All die who have lived, all have not lived who die." A life may attain to a high ideal though it is lived under the most ordinary conditions. No conditions could be more commonplace than those under which Christ lived nine-tenths of the time that He spent on earth.

It is impossible to regard outward success or applause as affording any indication that a man's work is destined to attain real permanence. We have only to note the kind of men to whom riches, titles and honours frequently fall to realise how low an estimate the supreme Disposer of all must set upon their value. If a man's work is to attain real permanence, he must be prepared to go on with it in just the same spirit whether in the eyes of men it seem to be successful or not. A friend once said to a Christian gentleman, when expostulating with him for not adopting a course of action which might bring him popularity, "Mr. —, you have not accepted the conditions of success". "No," was the reply, "but I have accepted the conditions of service and I leave the results in God's hands." The life of such a man or of any one who is striving to do his work, simple and commonplace as it may be, because he regards himself as God's servant and because he believes that his work is that which God has given him to do, and who is prepared to labour on without consideration of outward success or applause, has something in it which in time will outlast, even as in importance it outweighs the greatest visible products of human labour. There is a large measure of truth in the words which Browning puts into the mouth of the Abbot :—

Man's work is to labour and leaven—
 As best he may—earth here with heaven ;
 'Tis work for work's sake that he's needing :
 Let him work on and on, as if speeding
 Work's end, but not dream of succeeding !
 Because if success were intended,
 Why heaven would begin ere earth ended.¹

S. John, contrasting the transitoriness of the world with the permanence which man may nevertheless attain, wrote, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever".²

The first half of his statement has in it a ring of sadness ! "The world passeth away and the lust thereof." Everything that man sees around him, the work alike of nature and of man, is passing into decay and oblivion. The thought is one which affects him little when his life is full of action and of interest, but in hours of solitude and disappointment it comes upon him with its suggestion of sorrow and despair. But religion of Jesus Christ does something more than ponder and lament the transitoriness of human life or of the visible world. It transmutes the transitory into the eternal. The river of time, to which the course of life has often been compared, rolls on unchecked, but by the aid of religion, the gold

¹ "Pacchiorotto."

² 1 John ii. 17.

dust which it holds in suspension may be deposited imperishably. The pathos suggested by the first clause of the text serves but to enhance the comfort contained in the second : "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever". S. John does not say, that which a man doeth abideth for ever, but "he that doeth". The first statement is true in a real sense, but the second is a higher truth. It is, moreover, one which is distinctive of Christianity. There is no instinct more universal, nor any desire more deeply rooted in the human heart, than the instinct or desire which reaches out after something which will be permanent and may outlast the life of the individual. This desire has expressed itself in the past in three different ways. In early prehistoric days men sought after permanence by erecting buildings, which, by the massiveness and solidity of their construction might defy the ravages of time. The tower of Babel, we are told, was erected by men who said : "Go to, . . . let us make us a name". A more successful example is afforded by the pyramids, of which the Egyptian proverb says : "Time conquers all things, the pyramids conquer time". But, as civilisation increased, men came to realise that the permanence which a building could bestow upon its builder was hardly worth the trouble of securing, inasmuch

as it failed altogether to perpetuate the thoughts, or the personality, of its author.

Thus it was that the desire for permanence found a second mode of expression in the attempt which men began to make to perpetuate themselves by their writings. The works of the poet, the philosopher, and the historian have served to secure at least a comparative immortality, and across the bridge of centuries have brought to us some faint outline of their author's personality. This permanence is immeasurably higher than the first, though, like the first, it is limited to earth and knows nothing of a duration beyond this world. Of these two efforts to attain permanence Longfellow has said :—

All are architects of Fate
Working in these walls of Time,
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

There is a third and nobler method by which, since the preaching of the Christian faith, men have sought to attain permanence.

The Christian idea is not that of a material permanence, to be obtained from building, nor of intellectual permanence to be obtained from writing, but of a spiritual permanence to be obtained from work and to be recorded in the character of the worker. The attainment of this

permanence need not be hindered or conditioned by circumstances, however unfavourable, or by the complete absence of visible success. The life of Jesus Christ was the most successful life which this world has seen, but, at the time it was being lived, it seemed little more than one continuous failure.

The thought is one which should be a source of abiding strength. He who is called to labour on to the very close of his life, with little or nothing to encourage, but with everything to dishearten and depress, may gain comfort as he contemplates that life and remembers that it too was full of sorrow and disappointment.

Christ's life is a prophecy of that into which his own may be transformed. To come into sympathetic contact with that life is to find in Jesus Christ one who can not only set him free from the taint and power of sin, but can live over again His life in his own.

He only who can say with S. Paul, "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me," can understand the meaning of Christ's statement, "he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die".

The Christian doctrine that true permanence is to be secured by the moulding of human character after the divine pattern revealed to the world by Jesus Christ is one full of encouragement for

those whose lives are lived amidst humble or obscure surroundings.

The knowledge that their ordinary commonplace life may be productive of results to which the word permanent may be applied in a sense in which it cannot be applied to anything that they see around them in the world, should inspire them with hope and resolution.

When the scenes in which their life is now being lived shall have passed for ever away, then will the marks stamped upon their character by their own actions be abundantly made clear. They will then see that not one act of self-sacrifice, not one kind word or deed, though it may have been forgotten as soon as done, not even one unselfish thought harboured in the mind, but has left its deathless impress upon the character of the doer, and must therefore be as permanent as the spirit of man itself is.

All that is at all

Lasts ever past recall

Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.¹

¹ Rabbi Ben Ezra.

MEMORY.

MEMORY.¹

OF the parables spoken by Christ which contain references to a future life few are as hard to understand as is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus recorded by S. Luke. It was spoken in order to correct the assumption that the privileges which a man enjoys in the present imply that he will enjoy corresponding privileges hereafter. The Jewish imagery in which the teaching of the parable is embodied is hard to interpret, and it is impossible to deduce from its language any dogmatic statements in regard to the conditions of the life which awaits man hereafter. In whatever way, however, the details of the parable be interpreted, we are justified in claiming Christ's authority for the teaching (1) that memory will survive physical death, and (2) that memory will be the link of connection between the present and the future life.

I. The Greeks and Romans long accepted the belief that the spirit of each individual man,

¹ *Preached at Wellington Barracks, S. James's Park.*

after leaving this world, and after being confined for a period in Tartarus, passed through the river of Lethe, the waters of which had the effect of blotting out the whole of the past and of causing entire forgetfulness of what had been done or seen upon earth.

A similar belief still prevails amongst Hindus and Buddhists, who are taught that prior to each successive re-incarnation (the conditions of which are determined by his past actions) man forgets practically the whole of his former experience upon earth. The teaching of Christ is in striking contrast with that of the ancient Greeks and Romans and of the Hindus and Buddhists. In the parables of the rich man and Lazarus and of the sheep and the goats, and in several other passages, He taught that after death a man will be able to recall what he has done on earth and that his memory will become his accuser and his judge.

2. According to the teachings of modern psychology the continuity of memory is closely connected with the continuity of personality. We cannot think of ourselves as retaining our consciousness¹ if our memory of the past were to be

¹ M. Henri Bergson (writing in the "Hibbert Journal," Oct. 1911, p. 27) says, "Consciousness signifies above all memory. . . . A consciousness which retained nothing of the past would

permanently interrupted. The teaching of Holy Scripture and our increasing appreciation of the true nature of human personality alike justify us in believing that no river of forgetfulness awaits the soul hereafter, but that if our faculty of memory is to undergo any change it will be one of an exactly opposite kind.

A better illustration than that which the River Lethe suggests is afforded by the custom, which has often been followed in times of war, of writing secret despatches with what is called invisible ink. In the Indian mutiny, for example, the despatches which were sent from one body of troops to another, and which it was of the utmost importance to keep secret, were frequently written with this invisible ink, the result being that the paper on which they were written appeared to be blank until it was held to a fire, when the writing on it became legible.

The pages of the book of human memory on which men are now engaged in writing the records of their lives correspond to the paper on which the despatches were written. The writer on the pages of the book of memory cannot easily read even what he has himself written, and be a consciousness that died and was reborn every instant—it would be no longer consciousness. . . . All consciousness is memory : all consciousness is a preservation and accumulation of the past in the present.”

ere his work is finished may have but an imperfect recollection of what these pages contain. But the time will come when in the light which shines from the great white throne the books shall be opened "and the dead judged out of the things written in the books according to their works".¹

We may form some conception of what will take place hereafter by reflecting on the partial re-opening of the book of memory which is from time to time experienced in this present life. Many have told how in times of extreme danger the whole of their past life has stood out revealed with an incredible distinctness, and how things which they had done years before, and which seemed to them to have been forgotten entirely, have come back without any conscious effort on their part to recall them.

Numerous cases are on record which suggest how impossible it is to set any limit to the range of human memory or to the powers of the individual to recover what he has once acquired, even though he was unconscious at the time of its acquisition. One well-known instance, which was verified at the time of its occurrence by incontrovertible evidence, is narrated by Coleridge.² An

¹ Rev. xx. 12.

² "Biographia Literaria," vol. i. p. 117, ed. 1847.

ignorant servant girl at Göttingen, who could neither read nor write, in the delirium caused by fever repeated long passages of Latin, Greek and Rabbinic Hebrew. These were written down at the time and were afterwards identified as passages which the master whose servant she had been many years before had read aloud, and which she had had the opportunity of overhearing.

It would be possible to quote many instances of a similar kind which suggest that man's memory is like a series of photographic plates that automatically record everything that comes within the range of their action.

If, then, amidst the distractions and hindrances of his present experiences a man's memory can recover what it has seemed to lose, is it not inherently probable, apart from the express testimony of Scripture, that when he is undisturbed by superficial anxieties and freed from the prejudices and passions of his present life, he will be able to read as in a book all his past life.

To quote the words of a recent writer :—

“We experience in our present powers occasional conditions, moments of exceptional elation or exaltation, in which we unexpectedly and extraordinarily transcend our ordinary selves, and which are suggestions to us of what we might

become through permanent change in our present powers or organs. If, when drowning, one experiences a singular quickening of the power of memory, and recalls details long lost to ordinary consciousness, why may not some even physical change in us be the basis of that completer elevation of memory above the limit of common consciousness, which will be the opening of the books in the great day of universal judgment?"¹

To understand the scope and significance of memory is to appreciate the impossibility of separating human action from its results?

Our brief hours travel past,
Each with its thought or deed, its Why or How.
But know each parting hour gives up a ghost
To dwell within thee—an eternal Now!²

"It does not matter what I do now, because I can afterwards turn and repent, and it will be all the same in the end." These words, which were addressed to a clergyman in the north of England by a man whom he was visiting, embody a thought which tends to arise in the minds of young and old alike. The spirit of evil comes to the inexperience of youth and whispers to the schoolboy: "Fear not to do this or that which you know to be wrong, for you will be little the worse

¹ Du Bose, "High-priesthood and Sacrifice," p. 69 f.

² S. T. Coleridge.

for it now, and you can lead a different life when you grow up. Why should you not indulge yourself for awhile and then change afterwards and live a Christian life?" Will it be all the same to the boy when he grows up whether he has led a life of easy self-indulgence or of Christian self-denial, or will the writing on the tablets of his memory which have still to be inscribed be conditioned by what he has already written?

It is not only to the young and inexperienced that this suggestion is made. The boy leaves school and starts his work or business, but the same voice sounds in his ear, clearer or less distinct according as it has been followed or disregarded in the past. As one point and another arises in his daily life and occupation calling for immediate decision, and involving questions of right and wrong, of truth and of falsehood, the same voice whispers in his ear: "It will be all the same whether or no you live a pure and honest life; see how So-and-so is prospering, and he makes no attempt to act upon Christian principles; would it not be better to take your pleasure and make your profit now and try to lead a Christian life later on; it will thus be all the same in the end, no matter how you act in the present".

The same voice speaks even to the old, and suggests to the man to whom the memory of his

past life is becoming a burden that there is at least a chance that he may escape the consequences of his former actions, and that a death-bed repentance may obliterate the past, and thus it will be all the same in the end. Will it be all the same? When death sweeps away for ever the clouds of forgetfulness which conceal the past from his view, and the voice of God with its command, "Son, remember," sounds in his ears, his experience will be that described in the words

I looked behind to find my past
And, lo, it had gone before.

"Memory," said Aristotle, "is the scribe of the human soul." The writing of this scribe, like the writing of a diamond upon glass, will not rub out.

The words of the old Indian poet have a message for Christians as well as for Hindus :—

Yes, all the deeds that men have done
In light of day, before the sun,
Or veiled beneath the gloom of night,
The good, the bad, the wrong, the right,
These, though forgotten, reappear,
And travel silent in their rear.

The record, moreover, which memory is inscribing upon the soul of man, and which will one day become legible, is the record not merely of

personal experience but of the influence which a man has exerted upon the characters of others. When the earthly life of the individual man comes to its end and by the aid of a perfect memory he is enabled to look back upon the past, his happiest or, perchance, his most despairing thoughts will be suggested not by his personal experience of good or evil, but by the results which the influence of his life has produced upon the characters of others.

On the night succeeding a great battle the attention of a military chaplain who was visiting the wounded was attracted by a young man who was mortally wounded. In answer to the chaplain's inquiry, "Can I do anything for you?" the soldier said, "Sir, can you undo?" "No," said the chaplain, "I cannot undo, God cannot undo, but He can forgive what has been done." "Listen to my story," said the soldier, "and tell me if there is any hope for me. When I joined the Army there was in my regiment a young fellow who used to say his prayers and read his Bible. I laughed and jeered at his religion, I interfered with his prayers, and I prevented him from reading his Bible. The day came when he and I stood side by side in the battle of — and he was shot dead with an oath on his lips which I had taught him."

The question which was asked by the soldier in the hour of death, Can the influence exerted upon others in the past be undone? will be a question which many will long to ask when in the light of the great white throne the book of human memory shall be unfolded.

The most despairing thought that can come to a man is not the thought that by having lived a selfish life he has made it difficult or impossible for him to enjoy the vision of God; and that by a sentence against which there can be no appeal, inasmuch as it is inscribed on the tablets of his own memory, he is debarred from appreciating the joys of heaven. The most despairing thought that can come to him will be the recollection that by having lived a selfish and sinful life he has influenced others to do the same, who but for his influence might otherwise have lived a true life.

A corresponding experience, we may well believe, awaits the man whose life on earth has been the opposite to that described. When he has reached the end of his life and looks back upon it, his greatest joy will not be the knowledge that by God's infinite love and help he has himself passed in safety through "the waves of this troublesome world," and, having been "delivered from the burden of the flesh," has attained to

"joy and felicity," but it will be the knowledge that his efforts to live a pure, unselfish life have helped others to do the same who but for his help had despaired of doing so.

The knowledge that we shall one day have to read the record of our life and of the influence which it is exerting upon those around us, that we are in fact now engaged in writing the book out of which we shall be judged, should supply the strongest motive for self-discipline, and for self-examination.

As the writer of a book pauses from time to time to consider how his work will read when published to the world, so should we pause to reflect upon the material with which the tablets of our memory are being filled.

If it be true that memory is indestructible, if

Our deeds still travel with us from afar

And what we have been makes us what we are,

there would appear to be little ground for hope in the case of a man who desired to turn over a new leaf of the book of memory and to write on its remaining pages a record other than that with which the earlier pages had been filled, for

To forget is not to be restored ;

To lose with time the sense of what we did

Cancel's not what we did ; what's done remains.¹

¹ Clough.

Although nothing that a man can do in the future can undo the harm which his influence may have exerted upon others, it does not follow that he can do nothing to redeem the years that are past. The Gospel message is far from being a message of despair. Whatever his present life may be or his past record may have been, there is no one who desires to turn over a new leaf of the book of memory, who may not seek and obtain forgiveness for the past and Divine strength to lead a new life in the time to come. By the help which Jesus Christ can give to him he may thus fill up what is left of the book of memory in such a way that the re-opening of its pages hereafter may be to him a source of happiness. Perchance, too, in a future state of existence the opportunity may be given to him to stretch out a helping hand to some whom he had led astray during his life on earth, and thus in part to rewrite the record of the influence which he has exerted upon them.

FOUR OCCASIONS OF PRAYER

FOUR OCCASIONS OF PRAYER.

THE strongest, and to some minds the only, convincing argument for the efficacy of prayer is afforded by the example of Jesus Christ. His experience, though at first sight it may seem to accentuate the difficulty which is raised by the question, Why, if God be a loving and omniscient Being, should He wait till we pray before supplying man's needs? is in reality the surest pledge which man possesses that the question is not unanswerable. If Jesus Christ was what we believe Him to have been, He understood the nature and character of God more completely than any one else who has lived upon this earth. If then He, who knew God as no one else has known Him, regarded prayer as indispensable to the accomplishment of His life's work, we who claim Him as our exemplar cannot allow our ignorance of God's nature to serve as an excuse for undervaluing the efficacy of prayer or to weaken our belief in its obligation. The example of Christ does not explain for us the many difficulties which are connected with the practice of prayer, but it

assures us that beyond the limits of our knowledge an explanation exists. The knowledge that One who perfectly understood God's character was Himself a man of prayer affects our whole attitude towards the problems which the effort to pray still creates.

His example not only affords justification for the attempt to pray and an assurance that prayer will be productive of result, but the story of His life contained in the Gospel narratives furnishes some indications of the occasions when the need for prayer appeared to Him to be specially insistent. The four occasions referred to by the writers of the Gospels on which Jesus Christ spent a long period in prayer may suggest occasions in the lives of His followers when the effort to imitate His example should prove specially helpful.

The *first of these occasions* is referred to by S. Luke, who writes, "It came to pass in these days that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God".¹ Immediately afterwards we read: "When it was day he called his disciples and he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles". The words apostle and missionary are both formed from a verb meaning to send: in the

¹ S. Luke vi. 12.

one case the verb is Greek and in the other Latin. The twelve were chosen by Christ to be His personal friends in order that He might send them out as His apostles or missionaries to carry on His work throughout the world. It is easy for us now to understand how critical was the occasion of their choice. The spiritual history of the whole human race was influenced by the selection which was made as the outcome of this night of prayer. Although this occasion was in one sense unique, it may nevertheless be compared with occasions which have occurred in the lives of many of Christ's disciples. There have been times in the experience of many when the responsibility has been placed before them of choosing a friend or companion whose influence might to a large extent affect their life's work.

The example of Jesus Christ teaches how a man ought to prepare himself for such a choice. If He "who knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man," needed to spend the whole night in prayer before He made choice of those who were to become His intimate friends, His followers have at least equal need to spend long intervals in prayer as a preparation for the formation of their friendships.

How many a life has been ruined by an ill-chosen friendship. In how many cases have a

man's opportunities of serving God and of being of use to his fellowmen been curtailed, or destroyed, because he has regarded the choice of his friends as a matter of small concern, or as one which could be left to depend upon the circumstance of the moment, instead of regarding it, as did his Master, as a matter for prayerful thought and preparation.

A *second occasion* on which Christ retired in order that He might spend part of the night in prayer is referred to by S. Mark.¹ On the previous day, which was apparently a Sabbath day, He had preached in the synagogue of Capernaum, and when the evening had come and the legal Sabbath day was ended, He had healed Peter's wife's mother and many others who were sick of divers diseases. After these long-protracted labours, as S. Mark states, a "great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed". His prayer was eventually interrupted when "Simon and they that were with him" found Him and said to Him, "All are seeking thee".

The need which Christ sought to supply when He retired into a desert place to pray was the outcome of conditions which are constantly reproduced in the lives of His followers. His

¹i. 35.

retirement from intercourse with men was not prompted by the desire to occupy an interval in His day's work in prayer and meditation. Few such intervals could have occurred during the course of His public ministry. It was prompted by the consciousness that a life of almost unbroken occupation rendered long-continued acts of prayer so indispensable that opportunity for these must be created even by the sacrifice of the night's rest which followed upon a day of exceptional fatigue. The example of Christ forbids us to be satisfied with the excuse which is often urged by those who call themselves His followers: "I have so much to do that it is impossible to find time for prayer". It is the busiest people who have least right to shelter themselves behind this excuse, because it is the busiest people who can least afford to neglect prayer, and to be without the help and consecration which prayer can give to their work.

Many a man whose life has been one of ceaseless activity, and who has been actuated by a genuine love of God and his fellowmen, has realised at the end of life how much more effective his work had been had he laboured less and spent more of his time in prayer. When a man's life is full of occupation, and the fulfilment of his duties towards others leaves him with

hardly a minute which he can call his own ; when, as the day draws to its close, he feels so tired that prayer becomes a physical impossibility, he does well to recall his Master's example and, if he can find no other opportunity, to rise before the dawn of day in order to spend time in prayer.

A *third occasion*¹ on which we read that Christ retired to the mountain alone to pray was when His work had just been productive of signal outward success, when, as S. John states, the people were about to come and, if need be, take Him by force in order to make Him their king. Instead, however, of welcoming the homage which was offered, Christ separated His apostles from the multitude, and constrained them to get into a boat and to start for the opposite shore of the lake, and then retired alone in order to spend the earlier part of the coming night in prayer to God. Jesus Christ knew the true value of the popularity and applause which had for the time become His. This was not the kind of success which He desired to achieve. It was not to win popularity that He had come into the world, but to serve, to suffer and to die. He knew, moreover, that such popularity, far from being an indication of success, was a sign that His mission had been

¹ Cf. S. Matt. xiv. 23 ; S. John vi. 15.

misunderstood, and was in danger of becoming a failure.

The fact recorded by His biographer that He left the multitude who were desirous to retain Him, in order that He might spend the night in prayer, suggests that He regarded the occasion on which He had achieved His greatest visible success as one which called for special prayer. The experience of Jesus Christ stands in close relation to that of His followers. In their case the need for prayer amidst circumstances of outward success must be at least as great as was His, nor is this need any less real because it is with difficulty realised. In times of sorrow or of difficulty, when a man cannot hide from himself his need of external help, it is comparatively easy for him to spend time in prayer. Many a man has learnt to pray as it were by compulsion, having been forced to invoke the aid of One who might conceivably be able and willing to relieve his own trouble or the trouble of one whom he loves, but it is hard for him to feel the same compulsion when his life appears to be a success and when the world's applause, which should be to him an imperious call to prayer, dulls the consciousness of his need of Divine help.

A man never needs to call upon God for help more than when everything seems to be going

well, and when he is most apt to forget his need altogether. A well-known preacher in the Middle Ages, whose sermons had provoked rapturous applause, disappeared for a time from the scene of his work and was found at length by one of his friends with tears of penitence on his face lying prostrate before the cross. In reply to his friend's greeting he besought him to help him by his prayers, so that the hour of his visible success might not be the hour of his fall from grace.

On one *further occasion* we read that Jesus Christ sought seclusion in order that He might spend time in prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, which was lit by the Paschal moon, He was withdrawn from His disciples about a stone's throw, and prayed so earnestly that, as one of His biographers tells us, His sweat was as it were drops of blood falling down to the ground. His thrice repeated prayer to His Father that if it were possible the coming trial might be removed from His path seems to bring His experience within the range of our own.

There have been times in the life of almost every man when he has been face to face with approaching trial or temptation, when he has had no human friend to kneel beside him, and when as he has prayed, Father, let this cup of

sorrow pass from me, he has found it hard to add, nevertheless not my will but "thine be done".

At such times the recollection of what happened in Gethsemane may help him to believe that He who sent His angel to appear in visible form to strengthen his Master, will strengthen him, if need be, by angel ministries, and will help him to say, not with resignation but with joy, Thy will be done.

To sum up in a few words the thoughts which have been suggested.

1. There are times in our lives when we feel in a special degree the need of human friendship and when we long to come into closer touch with those who have been our acquaintances in the past. On such occasions we do well to imitate our Master and to spend long time in prayer, asking and expecting that God will choose for us our friends and will unite us to them in the bonds of His love.

2. There are times too in our lives, as there were in the life of our Master, when daily cares occupy every hour of the day and when our work seems to leave us little or no opportunity for devotion. At such times we have need to follow our Master's example and, if no other opportunity is afforded, to rise up a great while before day and enter into communion with God.

3. Again there are times when all seems to be going well, when those whom we have tried to help make eager response to our efforts and are ready to show their gratitude by their actions. At such times we need perhaps more than on any other occasions to retire from the world and to be alone with God.

4. Lastly, there are times when our life is clouded with sorrow and we cannot see a step in advance, when the help of human friendship is withdrawn, and we are called upon to make a sacrifice or to adopt a course of action from which our weak human nature recoils. It may be with us as it was with our Master that the supreme crisis of our life will occur at a moment not of physical but of mental suffering, when the anticipation of approaching evil tends to paralyse our will and to tempt us to give way.

Then it is that our Master's example may afford us inspiration and help.

Alike in the special crises of our life and in the routine of our everyday work, we shall find that our ability to walk in the steps of His most holy life will be proportionate to our determination to imitate His habits of prayer.

THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION

THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION.¹

THE tendency to regard religion as something unrelated to the fulfilment of the duties of everyday life has existed amongst all peoples and from the earliest times. The priests and augurs of Greece and Rome did not regard it as any part of their duty to raise the standard of morals accepted by their fellow-countrymen or to urge men to fulfil their social or civic obligations.²

As an extreme instance of the tendency to separate the profession of religion and the performance of the duties of life we may note the existence in India of six million fakirs, or holy men, some of whom are Moslems and some

¹ *Preached in Bathurst Cathedral, New South Wales.*

² "To make men virtuous was no more the function of the priest than of the physician. . . . The philosophic expositions of duty were wholly unconnected with the religious ceremonies of the temple. . . . It was the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity that its moral influence was not indirect, casual, remote or spasmodic. Unlike all pagan religions, it made moral teaching a main function of its clergy, moral discipline the leading object of its services, moral dispositions the necessary condition of the due performance of its rites."—Lecky, "Hist. of Europ. Morals," vol. ii. p. 2.

Hindus. They have no common creed or faith and their only point of agreement is the belief that the highest form of saintship is inconsistent with the performance of any kind of work. The whole six millions are therefore supported by the alms of their co-religionists. Their existence aggravates, and in part accounts for, the extreme poverty which characterises the Indian peoples generally.

The same tendency on the part of those who aspire to become saints to neglect the performance of the duties of secular life has appeared from time to time within the limits of the Christian Church. In the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era the number of those who abandoned their ordinary occupations and adopted the lives of hermits or monks was reckoned by hundreds of thousands. In later time the term "religious" was appropriated to those who lived such a life apart from their fellow-men. But even when the religious life as thus interpreted was held in highest repute, there were always some who believed, contrary to the prevailing opinion of their time, that the greatest saints were to be found amongst those who were endeavouring to serve God whilst living an ordinary commonplace life in closest touch with their fellow-men.

One such protest against the teaching which

was largely current in the Middle Ages is embodied in the old Italian tradition¹ of a hermit saint who, after spending forty years in lonely meditation and prayer in his cell upon the mountain side, was moved to pray that God would show him another man—

Whose soul in the heavenly grace had grown
To the self-same measure as his own,
Whose treasure on the celestial shore
Could neither be less than his nor more.

In response to his prayer he is told by an angel visitant that if he will go to the nearest town on the morrow he will find in the market-place a mountebank playing his tricks for show whose soul as seen by the light divine was neither better nor worse than his own. The hermit, filled with fear and misgiving, betook himself to the place indicated, and there found what seemed to him "a poor unsaintly man," whose face showed "no signs of inward peace or of answered prayers". When the performance was over the hermit questioned the mountebank, in the hope of finding that his life had been more saintly than it seemed to be, but found to his distress that until recently he had been one of a band of robbers. Eventually, on being pressed by the hermit to recall a single good deed which he had done, he

¹ See "Hidden Servants," by Francesca Alexander.

told how he had risked his life to save from shame a nun whom his companions had carried off, and how this "service small" rendered to God, whose laws he had previously defied, had marked the turning-point in his life. The legend tells how the hermit thanked God for the revelation which had been granted to him, that forty years of prayer and penitence had brought him as near to God as was this reformed thief. He then returned to his cell and spent twelve more years in prayer and in efforts to minister to the wants of those who lived on the mountain-side. Then after more than fifty years of devotion—

His soul was moved to pray once more
The prayer he had made twelve years before—
Only to know before he died,
If he were worthy to stand beside
One of God's children, or great or small,
Who served Him truly; and that was all.

In response to his petition he is told that within a short distance from his cell there is a dwelling-house which shelters two souls who are as near to his Lord as he is. The hermit set out to seek them, in accordance with the suggestions given to him, expecting to find them dwelling beneath the roof of a neighbouring monastery, but to his surprise he is led to a simple farmhouse where he finds two women. Asked by the her-

mit to explain what kind of life they had led, they tell him of their monotonous round of duty and service on behalf of the large household of which they formed a part. When, after listening to their tale, he urged them to tell him of at least one pious deed which they had done, they disclaimed the suggestion, and said that they were two poor wives who never had done a deed which could be so described. At length, in response to the hermit's repeated inquiry, the older of them said:—

“This summer have forty years gone by,
Since she—my sister-in-law—and I
Together came in this house to dwell,
And, Father, it is not much to tell,
But in all these years, from first to last,
No angry word has between us passed,
Nor even a look that was less than kind :
And that is all I can call to mind”.

As the hermit returned again to his cell he thanked God that his life of prayer had been as acceptable in His sight as that of these poor women, and he thanked Him yet again that His “Hidden Servants” were more numerous than he had ever before dared to imagine.

The existence of this mediæval legend shows that even in the days when the life of the hermit was regarded with the utmost veneration there were some who had realised the truth that there

were many of God's hidden servants, the trials and opportunities of whose commonplace lives have been the ladder by which they have climbed to His presence.¹

Though the teaching against which this Italian legend was a protest is not commonly held, at any rate in England, there are many persons who imagine that there is a necessary distinction between secular and religious work, and who have still to learn the lesson which the legend teaches, that the humblest occupations of domestic service afford opportunities for acquiring that Christ-like character which is the distinctive characteristic of the Christian saint, that are at least as great as those afforded by the solitude of the hermit or by the religious occupations of a "minister".

Dean Inge, speaking of "the assumption that

¹ A somewhat similar story is told of the Egyptian saint, Macarius, to whom it was revealed that two married women in a neighbouring village were more holy than he was. When visited by the saint they utterly repudiated the suggestion that their lives were in any way saintly. When the saint persisted in attributing to them good works which they were unwilling to confess, they said: "Holy Father, we are in no way related, but we married two brothers. We have lived together for fifteen years, without an angry word. We have entreated our husbands to let us leave them, to join the societies of holy virgins, but they refused to permit us, and we then promised before Heaven that no worldly word should sully our lips."

work which is connected with sacred or noble things is itself sacred or noble work," says : "I know of no worse snare than this idea. My housemaid when she sweeps my study does nobler work than I do when I am writing a sermon or lecture, if, as is likely enough, she does her work more conscientiously than I do. We have therefore small reason to congratulate ourselves if our work is concerned with some big subject, or to commiserate ourselves if it seems to be on a small scale. . . . The blessing which his work brings to a man depends hardly at all on the subject on which he is working, and almost entirely on the spirit in which the work is done."¹

If this be so we need to put far from us the suggestion that the highest form of religion is only to be attained by clergy or by those who are withdrawn from secular pursuits, and that it is beyond the reach of those engaged in the ordinary occupations of life.

The highest embodiment of the religious spirit is not to be found in monastery or convent, but it is rather to be sought amidst the busiest scenes of our great cities, in the merchant's office or the tradesman's shop, where is to be found a man who, with a low standard of morality and honesty around him, and with everything to discourage

¹ "Speculum Animæ," 48, 49.

him from any high purpose, refuses to accept the standards of conduct accepted by those around him, and lives a truly unselfish life notwithstanding. The plea is sometimes urged by the man whose life has become a moral wreck, that his course was determined for him by the circumstances of his life. Circumstances, however, are to a man's life what wind is to a ship. As the sailor may not plead his inability to sail in any direction other than that in which the wind blows, so the man whose life is lived under unfavourable circumstances cannot divest himself of his responsibility to make these surroundings subserve the true purpose of his life :—

One ship drives east, and one drives west,
By the self-same wind that blows.
It's the set of the sails, and not the gales,
Which determines the way it goes.

Few, if any, of life's voyagers will be able to say when their journey is completed that the conditions under which their life was lived were so entirely unfavourable that all progress towards their life's true goal was from the first impossible.

Religion is not doing, still less talking, but being. It is not so much a duty as something which lies behind and conditions all duties. S. Paul, when writing to the Christians at Rome, where the associations of ordinary life must have been

entirely secular, could bid them in one and the same breath be "in diligence not slothful, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord".¹

We have an echo of S. Paul's words in the language used by S. Ignatius in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "Even those things which ye do after the flesh are spiritual, for ye do all things in Jesus Christ".²

But though this view of religion is clearly taught in the New Testament, how few realise its bearing upon their individual lives! How few merchants and tradespeople realise that they are individually responsible for raising the standards of trade and for infusing the spirit of Christianity into business! How few in the higher ranks of social life realise that it belongs to them to use their superior culture or wealth to raise the tone of society in which they live and to make it more sympathetic and less artificial than it at present is! Once more, how few of those engaged in the noble occupation of teaching realise that the chief value of their position lies in the opportunities which it affords for instilling into the minds of the young by word and example Christ-like ideals of life and character!

¹ xii. 11, R.V.

² "Ep. ad Ephes." viii. ἃ δὲ καὶ κατὰ σάρκα πράσσετε ταῦτα πνευματικά ἐστιν · ἐν Ἰησοῦ γὰρ Χριστῷ πάντα πράσσετε.

To exert a religious influence upon others does not necessarily imply the frequent use of religious language. A man's conversation may contain few direct references to the highest of all subjects, but it may be none the less religious notwithstanding. It requires more religious principle to infuse a spirit of truth, earnestness, and love into ordinary conversation than to give utterance to the most fervent religious sentiments or confessions of faith.

In the case of the man who would live a religious life his every action must be controlled by religious principle. This does not mean that the thought of religion must be consciously present in his mind in every action that he performs. For as it is in the physical, so is it in the spiritual world. There are many physical laws which condition a man's actions, of the existence of which he is seldom conscious. He does not think about the laws of gravitation each time he moves his limbs, nor about the atmospheric laws each time he breathes, but his every movement is conditioned and controlled by these laws. Even so is it in regard to his spiritual life. Amidst the engrossing occupations of his everyday toil he may meditate little upon the principles by which his spiritual life is controlled, but he may none the less certainly be affected by a celestial gravi-

tation and be breathing the atmosphere of Heaven.

A man's religion is the response which he habitually makes to spiritual forces of whose existence he may often be unconscious. More important than his actions is his attitude towards God and religion. That which matters most and will in the long run affect his character most is not what he is but what he aspires to become.

A little book, which has been a help to many, entitled, "The Practice of the Presence of God," contains the conversations and letters of Brother Lawrence, who, after being a soldier and a footman, served for many years as a cook in a French monastery during the seventeenth century, and whose reputation for saintliness of character was widely spread. The special feature of his conversations and letters was their insistence upon the fact that the most ordinary occupations of life afforded as complete scope for the practice of the presence of God as did the "exercises of religion".

"The time of business," he said, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity, as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacra-

ment." On another occasion he stated, "that he was more united to God in his ordinary occupations than when he left them for devotion in retirement from which he knew himself to issue with much dryness of spirit, and that our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for God's sake which commonly we do for our own".

The lesson which the monastery cook helped to teach his contemporaries, that the practice of the Presence of God is within the reach of all to whom it is the object of supreme desire, and that no occupation, however humble or commonplace, need stand in the way of its attainment, is one which needs to be emphasised to-day at least as much as in the days when Brother Lawrence worked as a cook in his monastery.

THE DAY OF THE CROSS

THE DAY OF THE CROSS.¹

THE day on which Jesus Christ died was generally known in ancient times as the Day of the Cross. The beautiful title Good Friday, which was first given to the day by the English Church, is still peculiar to English Christians. Parallel with the observance of the day has continued amongst the non-Christian Jews the observance of another day with which, in the minds of the early Christians, it was inseparably associated. To this day applies the command which was given to the Israelites when they were in the act of leaving Egypt, "Remember this day".² A consideration of the circumstances under which this command was given will throw light upon the observance of the day by which (in the case of Christian Jews) it was eventually superseded.

It will be easier to understand the significance of the command which was given to the Israelites if we try to answer three simple questions: (1) What is the day to which the command refers? (2) Why was it to be held in remembrance?

¹ *Preached in Bangor Cathedral.*

² Ex. xiii. 3.

and (3) When was its remembrance to be observed?

1. Had we asked an Israelite in olden time the first of these questions he would have had little difficulty in furnishing an answer. Whatever else an Israelite might forget, he could not forget the Day from which his national history dated, the day on which his people had been set free from Egyptian bondage and had been set apart for ever as God's chosen race. The day on which the first Passover was held was the day on which the Israelites were transformed from a horde of slaves into the people of Jehovah.

2. The answer to the first question includes the answer to the second : Why was this day to be remembered? It was to be remembered because on this day was effected the redemption of Israel. As the slave who had regained his liberty would look back upon the day when this priceless boon had become his as the red-letter day of his life, so a nation of slaves would look back upon the day of their national redemption as the day "to be much observed of all the children of Israel throughout their generations".¹

3. To the third question, When was this day to be remembered? may be given a twofold

¹ Ex. xii. 42.

answer. In Exodus (xiii. 3, 10) we read "Remember this day . . . in its season from year to year," but in Deuteronomy (xvi. 3) we read, "Remember the day . . . all the days of thy life". The annual commemoration of the day on which Israel was set free from the bondage of Egypt was accompanied with greater solemnity and ritual than were connected with any other festival, but the solemn associations of its annual commemoration did not lessen the obligation which rested upon every individual Israelite to keep the day in continuous remembrance.

We can imagine how pious and patriotic Israelites in the days of stress which befell them in later years must have looked back to this day and drawn inspiration from its annual commemoration.

(a) In days when, having been defeated in battle by the surrounding nations, they were for the time being brought into subjection by their enemies, they would remember how on this day they were delivered from the bitter oppression of the Egyptians and would recall the words attributed to their great lawgiver, "When thou art in tribulation . . . thou shalt return to the Lord thy God . . . For ask now of the days that are past . . . since the day that God created man upon the earth . . . hath God assayed to go and

take him a nation from the midst of another nation? . . . Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out with his presence, with his great power, out of Egypt.”¹

(b) Later on when prosperity and success had become theirs and when peace prevailed throughout their land, some at least amongst them must have begun to long for something more than material prosperity—for the spiritual blessings which their prophets had taught them to expect, and which could only come to them direct from God Himself. At such times, when engaged in the commemoration of this day, words such as those used by one of their Psalmists would be to them the welcome response to their aspirations : “I am the Lord thy God which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt : open thy mouth wide and I will fill it”.²

(c) Or, once more, when, in later days, their national existence was interrupted and they were carried captive into a distant land, far from their sacred city and its temple, the commemoration of this Day would remind them that God had delivered their forefathers from a bondage of four hundred years, and the recollection of the past would give them courage in looking forward to

¹ Deut. iv. 30 *sqq.*

² Ps. lxxxi. 10.

the future. At such times they would make their own the words of another of their Psalmists, who wrote: "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt, they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; nevertheless he saved them. . . . Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise."¹

In all the crises of their life the remembrance of what happened on this day was to the Israelites a source of constant inspiration. The recollection of the deliverance which God wrought on this day for their forefathers was to them in a true sense a "pillar of cloud by day" and a "pillar of fire by night," "to lead them" and "to give them light".

If we turn now from the experience of the Israelite to that of the Christian, we shall find that the command "Remember this day" has for him a meaning and application as real as it had for those to whom it was first given.

1. In response to the question, What day is the Christian bound to observe above every other day? the answer is, "The same day as that to which the command given to the Israelites referred, a day which has now been kept sacred for

¹ Ps. cvi. 7, 8, 47.

nearly four thousand years. For it was probably on the very day and at the very time that the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple courts that the Lamb of God was being offered for the sin of the world.

2. As we realise what event Christians commemorate on this day we do not need to ask the second question, Why is it that this day is to be remembered? The Day of the world's redemption was, and through eternity will ever appear, the most wonderful in all time, the day to which and from which all human history must be reckoned.

3. The answer to the third question, "When is this day to be remembered?" is the same for Christians as it was for the Israelites. "In its season from year to year" and "all the days of thy life."

From very early times the Christian Church has set apart a special day on which its members are invited to commemorate the events connected with the first Good Friday.

As in the case of the Israelites so in that of Christians, the annual commemoration of the day ought in no wise to interfere with that unceasing recollection of it which was enjoined in the command, "Remember this day . . . all the day of thy life." There are many occasions in the life of

a Christian when the remembrance of this day will have for him a special significance, such as the Passover had for the Israelites.

(a) In days of sorrow and gloom, when human sympathy fails, and when the face of God appears to be withdrawn, the disciple of Christ has need to remember this Day. This day was so dark that all others seem light beside it. From the Cross on Calvary come the words, "behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow".¹ Perplexed, as he cannot but be, by the mystery of the suffering which exists in his own life and in the world around him, it will be no small help to be able to say to himself, "The only One who penetrated to the depths of this mystery was Himself a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief".

(b) In days of temptation, or when the power of evil appears to be irresistible and the consciousness of human weakness begets a feeling of despair, the recollection that on this day the utmost power of evil was resisted and overcome by a representative of the human race will encourage the striver after purity and goodness to believe that he may become a participator in the victory of Jesus Christ.

(c) In days of doubt, when the man who is conscious of his own sinfulness finds it hard to

¹ Lam. i. 12.

credit the existence of Divine love, or to believe that God will forgive sin, the remembrance that on this day was given to the world the most convincing proof of the self-sacrificing love of God of which it is possible to conceive, will help to banish doubt and to create confidence and trust.

(*d*) In days of prosperity and success the recollection of what happened on the Day of the Cross will not make human joy impossible, but it will help to deepen and purify our happiness and to make it more lasting than it could otherwise be. For it will help us to realise that happiness is not a sickly plant, which can only live in the sunshine of success, and which must wither up before the chill blast of calamity or death, but that it may be for all men as indestructible as it was for Jesus Christ. We shall feel that what happened on Good Friday has made possible the fulfilment of Christ's prayer uttered almost within sight of the Cross, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be fulfilled".¹

(*e*) In days when work seems wearisome and toil unproductive, and when, because no apparent result attends our labour, we are tempted to relax our efforts, or to give way to despair, the

¹ S. John xv. 11.

remembrance that on this day the best life that has been lived upon this earth ended apparently in completest failure should help us to understand what constitutes success. In one sense it is true to say that "heaven is for those who have failed on earth".

(*f*) Lastly in times of prayer and devotion the remembrance of this Day should provide the highest incentive alike for prayer and for praise. What other event in the world's history affords so strong an assurance that prayer will be answered? Where else can be found a theme for such unceasing praise?

As in our private devotions or in our Church's most solemn act of worship we preserve "a perpetual memory of His precious death" and ask God "to accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," we appropriate for ourselves "the innumerable benefits which by His precious blood-shedding He hath obtained to us".

To sum up the thoughts which have been suggested : apart from its annual commemoration the follower of Jesus Christ has need to "remember this Day," in times of sorrow and discouragement, in times of temptation and doubt, in times of prosperity and success, in times of toil and work, and in times of devotion and prayer.

The Christian can say in the spirit of the old Jewish psalmist, "If I forget thee (O Calvary), let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."¹

¹ Ps. cxxxvii. 5.

AN AGE-LONG QUESTION

AN AGE-LONG QUESTION.¹

IT is still early in the morning as the last stage in the long-protracted trial in Jerusalem draws to its close. A large and excited crowd is collected before the Roman tribunal, raised above which on his official judgment seat is one who, though usually calm and unmoved, a man of decisive and often cruel action, is now the picture of hesitancy and indecision. He has tried one expedient after another to procure the release of his much-accused prisoner, of whose innocence he is himself entirely convinced, and, as a last resource, has reminded the crowd of his custom to release a prisoner to them at this Passover time, and has suggested that Jesus should be the one chosen. But, contrary to his desire and expectation, the people, stirred up by their rulers, refuse to accept his proposal, and demand, instead, the release of Barabbas, the robber and murderer. Then, every expedient seeming to be of no avail, he is heard to exclaim, in agitated and despairing tones :

¹ *Preached in Lichfield Cathedral.*

*"What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"*¹

The question was one which presented itself to, and was answered by, three different individuals or classes, within the space of a few hours. Though the answers which were given in each case were virtually the same the motives which prompted them differed widely. The first in order of time to whom the question came was one of Christ's own apostles; the traitor Judas. To him it had been suggested in thought, if not in words, "What shall I do with Jesus?" He was a man who, in outward appearance, had long been a follower of Christ, and must have seen many of His miracles performed, and listened to much of His teaching. In heart, however, he had been no true disciple; and when, at last, his material interests and those of his master were brought into direct opposition, when to continue His disciple meant to risk the loss of life and property, whereas to renounce his discipleship would probably secure both, he determined to betray his former Master and Teacher. The thought would probably have suggested itself to him that Jesus was certain to be taken by the Pharisees, sooner or later, and that since this was so, he might well reap some personal gain

¹ S. Matthew xxvii. 22.

by delivering Him into their hands. For whilst nothing short of a miracle could save Him from their power, this miracle was none the less likely to be performed in consequence of his action ; on the contrary he would be the means of hastening its occurrence and thus of bringing additional honour to his Master.

It is obviously a mistake to suppose that Judas was a mere villain, or that he was devoid of any religious qualities or aspirations. He had shared the hardships of Christ's life and was possessed of the faith, or spiritual power, which had enabled him to cast out devils. The interest attaching to the story of Judas is enhanced by the fact that he was not an utterly bad or degraded man, but was the representative of a large class who, despite the possession of religious impulses and aspirations, and despite their desire to combine the service of God with the promotion of their own interests, have faltered in their allegiance to the voice of duty and, before they have become conscious of the significance of their action, have become traitors to the cause of Christ and of God.

There are none who read the story of Judas to-day who would not shudder at the suggestion that for material gain they could ever have been willing to betray Jesus Christ, but even as they

have reprobated his conduct they have sometimes imitated his action.

Sinners who shudder at the crime
Which traitor Judas planned,
But mark his sin and think awhile
Where you may also stand ;
Ah, while you blame the Jews of old,
Beware lest you the Christ have sold.¹

Ruskin once said, " The sin of the whole world is essentially the sin of Judas ; men do not disbelieve their Christ, but they sell Him ".

Is there any one who can say that there has never been a time in his life when he has been confronted with the temptation of Judas ; when he has suddenly become conscious that to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, and to do what his conscience tells him the teaching of Christ impels him to do, is to incur the risk of material loss. It may be that the temptation has come to him in connection with his business or with the investment of money. He has realised that his Master's footsteps lead in a direction the opposite to that in which success or wealth appears to lie, and though for a time he has persuaded himself that his actions or methods of business are not really inconsistent with the teaching of Christ, the issue has at length become clear and the question

¹ Ober-Ammergau Passion Play.

has come to him in articulate form, "What shall I do with Jesus?" Failure to answer this question as his conscience tells him it should be answered must place him in the ranks of those who like Judas betray the cause of Christ:—

There walks Judas, he who sold
Yesterday his Lord for gold,
Sold God's presence in his heart
For a proud step in the mart;
He hath dealt in flesh and blood;
At the bank his name is good;
At the bank and only there,
'Tis a marketable ware.¹

This question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" was addressed to and answered by another class on the first Good Friday morning. It could have been no hope of gain which induced the crowd in Jerusalem to whom this question was addressed to answer it by the cry, "Let him be crucified; let him be crucified". They had not, as was the case with Judas, any personal advantage in view which their action might be expected to secure to them. What then was the explanation of the persistent hatred which they showed towards one who, as they all knew, was innocent of the charges laid against Him?

The explanation is to be found in the universal

¹ "The Ghost-seer," by James Russell Lowell.

tendency of men to entertain a personal grudge towards any one who by his example or teaching compels them to recognise that their own lives are different from what they ought to be, whilst they are unwilling to aim at the higher ideal which is placed before them.

Standing in front of the Jewish mob was One, the innocence and purity of whose life were a check upon the sin, the violence, and the impurity of their own lives. Even though He might never speak a word of rebuke, they could not but feel that His presence involved the condemnation of the lives which they were content to live.

The feeling of the Jewish mob was doubtless base and ignoble, but it was not unique. He who would understand its influence upon the Jews has need to interrogate himself and to ask: Has there never been an occasion in my experience when I have been living content with the standard of life which I have accepted, and with the way in which my religious duties have been performed, and when some one has come into my life whose standard of duty was higher than mine and whose love and zeal were a reproach to my selfishness and inaction? Was I not on such an occasion tempted to wish that I had never met such an one at all or that his presence might be

removed from me in order that I might cease to be disturbed by its suggestions?

He who can answer Yes to these questions is in a position to understand the feeling which, in its ultimate development, gave rise to the cry of the Jewish mob, "Let him be crucified".

Once again the question "What shall I do with Jesus?" received a practical, if not a verbal, answer from the man who gave expression to it, Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. It was no feeling either of avarice or envy which made Pilate, on that eventful morning, yield to the mob in what he himself acknowledged to be an unjust demand. Nor was his action due to indifference or wanton cruelty. On the contrary, moved, partly by his instinctive regard for justice, partly by a mysterious dread with which the sight of Jesus had inspired him, he made repeated efforts to deliver Him out of the hands of the Jews and to set Him free. It was not till he had tried every compromise that he could suggest, and till each effort had proved a greater failure than the one which preceded it, that he was heard at length to ask in despairing tones and with all unwonted agitation, "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" The difficulty which presented itself to his mind was this—a prisoner was standing before him in whom, as after repeated examina-

tion he had already acknowledged, he could find no fault whatever, and whom therefore it was his duty to acquit. Under ordinary circumstances he would have done so with little hesitation, but between the recognition of his duty and its performance the thought came, that were he to set Jesus free and so to make the Jews his enemies, they might report to Cæsar some of his former deeds of violence, and he might be deposed from his office. Pilate's conscience forced him to remember that he was guilty, and, in his case as in many another, guilt begat cowardice and cowardice weakness. Hence, when his duty and self-interest were brought into direct opposition, he refused to act up to the one in order, as he hoped, to secure the other. Little did Pilate think as he looked upon the seemingly helpless prisoner who stood before him, and said to Him, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee?" that the day would come when he and his prisoner would change places, and when he himself, arraigned before the bar of the universal Judge, would have to give account for the answer which he was about to return to his own question. How different would his action have been had he realised the future which lay before him!

There are few who read the story of Pilate's

action, who would not be prepared to say, "If only I could have had the opportunity which Pilate had of returning an answer by my action to his question, and of incurring unpopularity, or even the loss of everything, in defence of Jesus Christ, or His cause, how gladly would I have embraced such an opportunity, and how different from his would my action have been". The only means, however, by which a man can hope to discover what his action would have been had he been in Pilate's place is by applying to the interpretation of the past the lessons suggested by his present experience.

For the cause of Pilate's prisoner is still on its trial before the world, and the question to which he gave expression is an age-long question which alike from races and individuals still awaits its answer. There are many who are as ready as Pilate was to acknowledge the innocence of Christ's life and the justice of His cause, but who, like him, hesitate to incur unpopularity or to risk the loss of rank or position in its defence.

The scenes which were enacted on the first Good Friday are not mere episodes of past history, but are scenes that are constantly being re-enacted. The temptations which were addressed to the Jews of old are addressed to men to-day. Judas still lives. Many a man to-day who has

been a nominal follower of Jesus Christ, has allowed the spirit of covetousness to dominate his life, little realising that as he yields to its influence he is yielding to the temptation to which Judas succumbed. Many too are prepared to follow in the steps of Jesus as long as they can do so without incurring pecuniary loss or foregoing their personal ambition, but hesitate to continue His followers when, like Judas, they discover that the Master's steps lead ever toward the Cross. The story of Judas's bitter but unavailing remorse warns us of the danger of allowing covetous thoughts to remain unopposed in our minds for fear that we should find when too late that in our anxiety to secure our personal interests we too have betrayed the Christ.

Again, the sin which the mob committed when they rejected Jesus Christ and demanded His crucifixion finds its parallel to-day in the conduct and attitude of those who regard with jealous dislike all whose Christ-like lives remind them that their own lives are selfish and ignoble. The story of the Jews—whose reckless words, "His blood be on us and on our children," was followed by the literal accomplishment of their own imprecation—is a warning to all who allow envy to blind their eyes to the appreciation of lives that are better than their own. To yield to such a

temptation is to take sides with the Jewish mob in their rejection of the divine ideal of human life which Christ came into the world to reveal.

Once more, the experience of Pilate finds its parallel to-day in the hesitancy and indecision of those who, though they make little or no profession of religion, have a real desire to do what is right and just, but are afraid to defend the right at the risk of incurring unpopularity. To them speaks, in words of warning, the story of the Roman judge who a few years later died by his own hand in banishment and disgrace.

For each in turn the story of the betrayal and trial of Christ has its warning and appeal. For those who like Judas have long regarded themselves as His followers ; for those who, like the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, have a zeal for God but have never been enrolled as His disciples ; and for those who like Pilate have known nothing of His teaching but have a real desire to do what they believe to be right.

The appeal which Jesus Christ made to the Jews of old and which He still makes is a personal appeal. We cannot substitute for the question to which Pilate gave expression, What shall be my attitude towards the Bible or towards the doctrines which Christians have deduced from

the Bible? Search after truth is a high emprise, but the aim of the Christian is higher, which is to be united to Him who could say of Himself, "I am the truth".

The claim which Jesus Christ makes upon men, and which is embodied in the question "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" is a claim for loyalty, for obedience and for imitation, and is addressed both to the conscience and to the intellect. To be a Christian is to make response to this question by enthroning Him as King, by accepting Him as teacher, and by the imitation of the life concerning which one of His followers wrote: "Hereunto were ye called . . . that ye should follow his steps".

THE POWER OF GOD.

THE POWER OF GOD.¹

IF we were asked to say what kind of questions excite the most sustained interest in the world, whether they are questions relating to history, literature, or philosophy, or whether they are those which relate to social or political life, there could be no hesitation as to the answer which must be given. The age in which we live is a practical one. Short of charging a man with a crime we can scarcely say a worse thing about him than to suggest that he is unpractical. There are a certain number of men, possessed of learning and leisure, who take a real interest in abstract questions, the decision of which, one way or the other, would make no visible difference ; but for the vast majority the system that will not work, or that has no direct bearing upon life, stands self-condemned.

The question is often suggested to one who looks at the average congregation to be found in church on Sunday—Why is it that the proportion of working men is so small? Why is it that in

¹ *Preached in St. Margaret's church, Westminster.*

many towns the number of men in a parish are to be reckoned by thousands, whilst the number in church can hardly be reckoned by tens? If we ask the average working man to explain why this is so, the answer we should get would be something of this kind. He would say, "The religion which you profess is very good for those who have time to spend upon religious duties; the services and music in your churches are very beautiful, but after all the religion which you ask us to adopt is not sufficiently practical; the life that we are forced to live is ordinary and commonplace; our struggle for subsistence is hard, our health is our only capital, ours is a workaday world, we cannot afford to spend time or thought on that which has no practical value."

It may be urged that an answer such as this implies a complete misunderstanding of Christianity and a misrepresentation of its teaching. Doubtless this is so, but no one who has talked to working men, especially in great towns, will be prepared to deny that this opinion is largely held amongst them. If it cannot be shown that Christianity is a power, and that it is no mere system of philosophy and dogma but one which has a close and necessary connection with practical life, the days of its influence, if not of its existence, are numbered.

The question will be asked—In what way has the Gospel of Christ been proved to be a power? The criterion by which we judge power is the result which it is capable of producing. It does not follow that because the source of a power is invisible, the power is therefore small. The greatest natural force of which we know anything—electricity—is at once invisible and inexplicable. The same may be said of the greatest moral forces which exist in the world.

We cannot explain the power which the life and death of Jesus Christ have brought to bear upon the hearts of men and upon the history of nations, but the effects which we can see of the working of this power justify us in asserting that there is none greater.

What is the most difficult thing in this world to do? Is it to overcome the forces of Nature, to turn the course of rivers, or to gird the world with electricity? There is something more difficult than any of these which is nevertheless being accomplished. An Arabic proverb says: "If a man tell you that a mountain has moved out of its place, believe him; but if he tell you that another man has changed his character, believe him not". The story of the life and death of Jesus Christ is daily accomplishing what the Arabs declared to be incredible.

If we cannot honestly say that the Gospel of Christ has been to us the power of God and has helped to change our characters, we may nevertheless test the reality of its potential influence by a careful examination of what it is doing in non-Christian lands. As we do so we shall realise more and more clearly that Christianity rests upon evidence afforded not by the miracles of the past but by the miracles of the present.

It has ever been the case that those who have lived in any particular age have failed to gauge aright the importance of what has been happening within the limits of their own horizon. We look back now upon a distant past and are in a position to understand the far-reaching significance of the tiny Christian communities which were scattered throughout the early Roman Empire, and the decisive influence which the faith which these communities imperfectly understood and practised was destined to exert upon the future of that Empire. When the history of what are now non-Christian countries comes to be written by the impartial and well-informed historian of the future, a prominence out of all proportion to that which is now given to the doings of Christian missionaries of to-day will be given to the results which their work will have produced.

That which the intelligent student of Christian Missions already discerns will then be made manifest to all, *viz.*, that the preaching of the Christian faith supplies a motive force which can raise the ideals and transform the destinies of individuals and of nations such as no other religion has ever supplied. Any one who has made a careful study of the work which missionary societies are doing in non-Christian lands can supply illustrations of the miraculous changes of character which the preaching of the faith of Christ is daily producing.

No one, for example, who has had the opportunity of witnessing the influence which the Christian faith is exerting in India upon individuals and upon races can entertain serious doubts as to the future of religion in that country. The number of Christians in India, according to the Government census, taken in 1901, was just three million. The census which was taken in 1911 gives their number as nearly four million.¹ A comparison of the last four census returns shows

¹ The most striking increase in the Christian population has been in North India and in Burma. In the Punjab the increase of the Christian population has been 128,000, i.e. 446 per cent, in the Central Provinces 169 per cent, and in the United Provinces 75 per cent. In Burma there has been an increase in the number of Christians of between seventy and eighty thousand, i.e. 43 per cent.

that India is becoming Christian twice as rapidly as Europe became Christian during the early centuries of our era.

In Southern India the movement towards Christianity which began amongst the outcastes is already spreading to the Sudras and higher castes, and although, as was the case when the several countries of Europe were converted, there are many Christians whose actions do not correspond with their profession, the acceptance of the Christian faith has transformed the lives not only of individuals but of communities. Any one who walks from village to village in South India will not need to inquire whether the particular village which he is about to enter is Christian or Hindu. He has only to watch the countenances of the villagers, or even those of their children, to see the frank, intelligent look which is the visible sign that they have been set free from the superstitious fears engendered by the degraded form of Hinduism which they had before professed, and that new hopes and new ideals have come into their lives. These new hopes and ideals have in many instances given birth to a noble discontent with the hopes and ideals of popular Hinduism, which had satisfied its professors in the past. Of the Christian missionary it may be said,

'Tis your torch
Makes the place dark, the darkness let alone
Grows tolerable twilight. ¹

The preaching of the Christian faith has lifted the veil which has hung over the mysteries of life and death and which has checked the aspirations and darkened the existence of many. It has answered the challenge implied in the inscription which stands over the Egyptian temple of Isis, "I am whatever hath been, is, or ever will be, and my veil no man hath lifted".

Never before in the history of India have the opportunities of developing an Indian Branch of the Christian Church on Indian lines been so great as they are to-day. Humanly speaking it is certain that every additional European who can be sent out to South India, and especially to the Telugu country, to take part in the training of those who are to be the Indian clergy of the future, will mean a large increase in the Christian population of India in the near future.

What is true of India is true to a large extent of China and Japan. In these countries no one recognises more strongly than the missionaries themselves that their task is not to convert a nation, but to teach those who shall become the teachers and prophets of their own people.

¹ Browning

No argument is more commonly brought against Christian Missions than that which is based upon the plea that there are so many un-Christian people at home, that it is wrong to neglect them in order to spend our energies abroad.

In estimating the force of this argument it is well to recall the experience of the Christian Church of North Africa in early times. Fourteen centuries ago it was possible to assemble five hundred bishops in North-west Africa, each of whom represented a considerable Christian community. Of this Christianity no living trace remains to-day. On the southern edge of the Great Desert near the shores of Lake Chad I have seen a Christian cross wrought into the sword-handle of one of the Tuareks who roam over the Desert, and farther north a Christian cross tattooed on the foreheads of some of the Kabyle women. These people, who are now fanatical Mohammedans, admit that this cross is a sign that their ancestors were once Christians. Its presence is the only remaining trace of a Christian Church which has perished.

It would take long to discuss the circumstances attending the unique disaster which befell the Christian faith in North Africa, but as to the chief cause there can be no doubt. The Chris-

tians of North-west Africa acted upon the assumption that the performance of their duties towards the nominal but very imperfect Christians to be found in the coast towns set them free from any obligation to attempt the evangelisation of the heathen in the interior. The voluminous writings of Cyprian and Augustine, who were bishops in North Africa during the third and fourth centuries, contain constant references to the needs of those who were already Christians, but none to missionary work amongst the peoples of the interior. The duty of attempting such work was apparently unrecognised.

The Church which was content to keep its faith to itself, was swept out of existence by the great missionary religion which started in Arabia and which recognised as the foremost duty of its adherents the propagation of the faith taught by Mohammed.

It may be urged that the attack of Islam was so strong that no body of Christians, who could not defend themselves by the sword, could have hoped to resist it. History, however, forbids us to accept this explanation. At the time when Islam spread over North Africa and swept out of existence one of the most important branches of the Christian Church, it attacked with equal violence the Church of Armenia. What then

was the result? One result has been that for a thousand years the Armenian Christians have been subjected to a ceaseless persecution, and that there has never been a time in which it has not been to the material interest of the Christians to become Mohammedans. Though countless thousands have been murdered because they have refused to deny their faith, there are to-day nearly six million Armenian Christians.

The persistence of the Armenian Church during a thousand years of continuous persecution is as significant a fact as is the disappearance of the African Church, and teaches a similar lesson. For in the early centuries the members of the Armenian and of the Assyrian Church (which has also survived) were noted for their missionary activities. Thus in the thirteenth century the Assyrian Patriarch of Babylon, assisted by twenty-five other patriarchs and a large number of bishops, ruled over a great missionary Church which reached as far as Cambaluc (the modern Peking) in the north-east and Kabul in the south-east. Though the members of these Churches have ceased to act as missionaries, as the result of Mohammedan persecution, the blessing which their forefathers won remains with them, and it may be that in the future they will again become a great missionary power,

The lesson which the experience of North-west Africa and of Armenia teaches is that the Church which concerns itself only with its own people and refuses to acknowledge any obligation to evangelise the world, has reason to fear for its own continuance, whereas the Church which is willing to make large sacrifices in order to spread the knowledge of its faith in distant lands will ensure the stability of its work at home, and will transmit a blessing to generations that are yet unborn.

The cause of Missions, which is the cause of Christ, will eventually triumph with or without our aid. We may shut our eyes to the highest needs of our fellow-countrymen abroad and of the non-Christian world. We may soothe the promptings of our conscience by the shallow excuse that we have seen or heard of missionaries who are not wise and judicious and endowed with as much common sense as we could wish, or we may quote cases in which we, or a friend of ours, had a servant in India who called himself a Christian and was not, and on the strength of his hypocrisy may assume the insincerity of all Indian Christians. Nothing is easier than to find plausible excuses for refusing to study the history of Christian Missions or to ally ourselves with those who are trying to spread the Christian

Faith throughout the world ; but when our short life here is ended and we come to look back upon the past and upon what one day will be the complete victory of the Faith of Christ, ours will be the unavailing remorse that the opportunity to follow in the steps of Christ, and to show our belief in the love of God by embracing every opportunity given to us for making known that love to all men, was offered to us but offered only to be rejected by us.

The greatness of our present opportunity is the measure alike of our privilege and of our responsibility.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR MISSIONS.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR MISSIONS.¹

THE purpose of Christian Missions is the fulfilment of the petition which Jesus Christ taught His disciples to offer, "Thy kingdom come". In order to understand the bearing of this petition upon the work of Christian Missions it is not necessary to define the exact meaning of the word Kingdom. The coming of the Kingdom of God may be taken to mean the spiritual reconstitution of human society which is needed to bring it into harmony with the divine ideal.

Those who offer this petition intelligently will not undervalue the partial revelations of Himself and His Kingdom which God has made through the teachings of non-Christian religions. They will gladly recognise that He has already given to the world a partial revelation of Himself and His Kingdom through the teachings of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and that the complete answer to their prayer will not involve the repudiation of these imperfect forms of

¹ *Preached in Madras Cathedral.*

revelation, but their absorption in a more complete manifestation.

To appreciate the importance which Christ desired that His Church should attach to the petition that the Kingdom of God may come, it is necessary to notice the position which it occupies in the prayer of which it forms a part. It stands at the very beginning of that prayer. Christ bids men pray that God's Kingdom may come before they ask for the supply of their material wants, even before they ask for the forgiveness of their sins. Even before the time of Christ the Jews had realised their obligation to pray for the establishment of the Kingdom of God, as is shown by the rabbinical maxim, "that prayer wherein is not a mention of the Kingdom of God is not a true prayer". The failure on the part of individuals and of Churches to receive a full answer to their prayers may often be explained by their neglect to take note of the words which stand at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, "after this manner pray ye". Those who have repeated this prayer most frequently have sometimes forgotten that before Christ bade men pray to God to give, to forgive, and to defend, He bade them seek for reverence, for the missionary spirit, and for active participation in the carrying out of God's will.

We have only to find an individual, or a community, that has lost the desire to spread Christ's Kingdom on earth, in order to find one whose spiritual life is in danger of becoming dwarfed, or extinguished. There is no argument at once so plausible and so false as that put forward by men who urge that the difficulties of the Church's work at home are so great that missionary work abroad ought to be postponed. There are not a few who are inclined to say: "Look at the difficulties which the Christian community has to face at home, at the passive indifference, if not open hostility, to the teaching of Christ which is to be found in our midst. Ought we not to devote our whole energies to resisting the attacks of the enemy at the gate, instead of letting our eyes wander to the ends of the earth?"

The true answer to this question is suggested by a scene which occurred before the gates of ancient Rome. The city was compassed about by a barbarian host; the people from the country round had left their homes and were gathered within its walls, and its capture appeared to be imminent, when suddenly the Gauls struck their camp and, without making any attempt to storm the city, beat a hasty retreat. The explanation of their conduct is to be found in the fact that one of their own spies, who had been within the city,

had told them that the land on which their tents were pitched had just been sold by auction at a very high price ; so confident were the Romans of final victory over their assailants.

If Christians to-day are to act in the spirit of the ancient Romans, instead of being discouraged by the difficulties which immediately confront them, they will say : " We will show our confidence that our difficulties at home will eventually be overcome by fixing our attention upon the ground which has yet to be won abroad. For every challenge which is offered at home we will start a fresh missionary attack upon sin and ignorance abroad."

The spirit with which those at home should regard the missionary work of the Church abroad is that which inspired the answer given by a woman to a stranger who, on hearing that her only son had left her to go abroad as a Christian missionary, said, " Did you not feel his going very much ? " " Yes," was her reply, " there is only one thing I would have felt more, his staying at home."

In the case of the majority of those who offer the petition, " Thy Kingdom come," the opportunity may never be given to translate their prayer into visible action. But this does not mean that they are debarred from doing anything

to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom in foreign lands. The help which those at home may give to those in the foreign mission field may be illustrated by a scene taken from the early history of the Israelites.

Few, if any, battles have as good a claim to be included in the decisive battles of the world's history as the first which the Israelites fought after their exodus from Egypt. The truth of this statement will be apparent when we consider the conditions under which the fight took place. But a few days had elapsed since the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and entered the wildernesses of the Sinaitic peninsula. They had left Egypt as a horde of slaves, unaccustomed to the hardships of desert travel, imperfectly armed, and wholly inexperienced in war. On approaching the wells of Rephidim they were suddenly confronted by the most warlike of all the desert tribes, which doubtless claimed the wells as its possession and resented the approach of strangers. The contrast was great between the disorganised crowd of Israelites and the well-armed host of Amalekites, who had been born and bred in the desert, and had been accustomed to fighting from their earliest days.

The immediate danger which confronted the Israelites was that of perishing through thirst,

nor did their danger pass when their wants had been miraculously supplied by what appeared to be the direct intervention of God. It was then that their foes left the wells and advanced to make a direct attack upon them.

How great were the issues which hung upon the approaching fight! Had the Amalekites been successful, as they doubtless expected to be, and had the Israelites been annihilated, or reduced again to slavery, how different might have been the subsequent moral and religious development of the Semitic and European races, and indirectly of all mankind! It is not easy to conceive what would be the present condition of England, or of Europe, if the religious experiences of the Israelites had not prepared the way for and rendered possible the Christian revelation.

The present is often spoken of as "The decisive hour of Christian Missions". Those who use this expression urge that Christian Missions have reached a point in their development when additional support would render possible a critical advance which would profoundly affect the development alike of the non-Christian peoples of the Far East and the pagan races of Africa.

To appreciate the means by which success may be secured in the present crisis, it is worth while to study carefully the conditions under which

success was attained by the Israelites in this desert battle. The account given in Exodus states that the Israelitish leader, after completing the arrangements for the battle, took no direct part in it himself, but climbed a hill overlooking the scene of battle, and remained there the entire day with his hands stretched out towards heaven in the Oriental attitude of prayer. It is further stated that so direct was the connection between his prayers and the progress of the fight that when these ceased victory inclined to the Amalekites, and when they were again renewed, to the Israelites. Ever and anon throughout the long day, as those engaged in the conflict below looked up to the spot where their leader stood, they gained fresh courage from the knowledge that his hands were stretched up to heaven in prayer on their behalf, till at length, as the day declined and his prayers continued, a decisive victory was secured.

In seeking to trace an analogy between the conditions under which success was attained by the Israelites in their fight against the Amalekites and those under which success may be secured in every decisive hour of Christian Missions, two points may be specially noted.

1. In the struggle which is going on, especially in non-Christian lands, and which has for its

object the overthrow of all that is opposed to the spread of God's Kingdom upon earth, an opportunity to exercise a decisive influence upon the final issue is granted to those who, like Moses of old, are not called to take any visible part in the struggle.

2. If the help which can be given by those who stand outside the scene of the visible conflict is to be effective, it must not be spasmodic but continuous.

The first thought is one full of encouragement to those to whom is denied the privilege of engaging in actual missionary work in foreign lands. Though unable to stand shoulder to shoulder with their comrades who bear the burden and heat of the day in the struggle against ignorance and sin, they, no less than Moses of old, may exert a decisive influence upon this struggle. It may be that in some far-distant land which we have never seen, the issue of the fight between good and evil, between truth and error, is even now trembling in the balance. Which of us then will dare to neglect the privilege which the power of intercessory prayer confers upon him, of securing by his prayers a victory for the cause of God and of truth? In respect of missionary work it may be said with confidence, He who prays most helps most.

Archbishop Benson, referring to the results produced in the foreign mission field by intercessory prayers offered in church, said: "There is a heathen man on some unknown shore who will perhaps be touched by the voice that rises this morning from this church, goes up to God and is sent back by Him to the right man. That man is thinking of nothing of the sort. But a voice at his side will seem to call him to God. He is not so much as seeking goodly pearls. But a voice will say to him, 'Here is a pearl of great price sent you, take it and be glad'; and the voice will be yours though you know it not."

The second thought is that if intercessory prayer is to be effective it must not be spasmodic but must be maintained even (as in the case of Moses) at the cost of physical inconvenience.

He who would offer effective aid to those who are trying to bring about the establishment of God's Kingdom abroad will not be content with the mechanical repetition of the petition "Thy kingdom come". Nor will he be content with occasional news which may reach him from the front. He will make himself intimately acquainted with the nature and difficulties of the work which is being carried on, and will endeavour to form links of personal friendship with the

workers. He will watch, even if it must be from afar, every point gained or lost in the Holy War which is being waged, and will esteem it his highest privilege to be of the number of those "who lift hands of prayer" in its behalf.

THE VISION OF JESUS.

THE VISION OF JESUS.¹

THE New Testament contains an historical account of the life of Jesus Christ, and a series of letters which suggest the practical application of the lessons taught by His life. It contains also, though in fragmentary form, the biography of a man who had so fully realised his union with Christ that he could say with sincerity "to me to live is Christ". The interest attaching to his biography is increased by the fact that S. Paul had never come into contact with, and had apparently never seen, Jesus Christ when He was living upon the earth. On one occasion, when called upon to defend himself before a Roman governor against the accusations of his fellow-countrymen, he endeavoured to explain the experience which befell him sixteen years before and which had changed the whole course of his life, and had made him the eager follower of Him whom he had before persecuted. His explanation was summed up in the words, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". The words

¹ *Preached in Ripon Cathedral.*

contain the secret of the change which came over the Apostle's life at a single critical epoch, and of the marvellous power and success by which it was afterwards characterised. A study of the account which he has himself given of his conversion will serve to show the essential characteristics of the vision which transformed his life. This vision was to him not simply the revelation of fresh truth, nor of new or higher principles of action, nor was it merely a light thrown back upon his former life, disclosing the sins and mistakes of the past, but, alike in its relation to his future and his past, it was to him the revelation of a personal Saviour. He never forgot in after life the significance of the vision which he then saw. Thirty years later, at the end of his life, he uses words which recall the occasion of his conversion, "I know whom I have believed". Christianity was to S. Paul, not the acceptance of doctrines concerning Christ, but loyalty to a living person.

Christ! I am Christ's! and let the name suffice you,
Ay, for me too He greatly hath sufficed;
So with no winning words I would entice you,
Paul has no honour and no friend but Christ.¹

He succeeded, as perhaps no other preacher of the Gospel has since succeeded, in carrying conviction to those who heard him, because he

¹ "S. Paul," by F. W. H. Myers.

realised, as few have ever done, the closeness of the union between himself and Jesus Christ.

To many who read to-day the story of S. Paul's conversion, the thought suggests itself that the account here given is one which stands by itself, and is far removed from the experience of everyday life. Possibly they have gone further and thought, if not said : "If only we could share the experience of the Apostle, if only we could hear a voice speaking from heaven, and behold with our natural eyes what S. Paul beheld, how easy would it be to obey such a voice, to follow such a vision, and to live ever afterwards in the light of such a revelation!" Natural as this thought is, but little reflection is needed in order to realise how incorrect is the deduction suggested. If any one were to experience to-day exactly what S. Paul experienced, if Christ spoke to him with human voice, as we believe He spoke to S. Paul, how long would the evidence, miraculously vouchsafed to him, continue to render doubt impossible? The longer he dwelt upon the abnormal experience of which he had been the subject, the more likely would it appear to him that his memory was misleading him or that his senses had been deceived. Moreover, if the evidence continued to satisfy himself, it would not satisfy anyone else, or be of use to

others. The reality of the vision which S. Paul saw is proved, not by his mere assertion, but by the results which followed,—by the miracle which his conversion itself was. It would indeed be impossible to instance an occurrence which has a better claim to be regarded as miraculous than the conversion of the Apostle. The miracle involved in a sudden change of human character, such as that which occurred in the case of S. Paul is more wonderful than any apparent suspension of the laws of Nature. His miraculous vision is not the proof of his conversion, but the conversion is the proof of the reality of his vision.

Though S. Paul's experience was in a sense unique, and a repetition of its outward circumstances, if this were possible, would afford little help from an evidential standpoint, his experience is not unrelated to that of other men. We misunderstand the nature and meaning of his vision if we fail to realise that a vision, similar in essential character to that which he saw, forms part of the experience of many.

The truth and reality of the vision which is revealed to the individual to-day is confirmed by the testimony of a countless succession of Christian saints. A recent writer, after referring to the "spiritual vulgarity and Philistinism" displayed

"in ruling out the perfectly clear and consistent testimony of the saints," says : "We are willing to go to school to the poets even if nature has made us prosaic. . . . We believe that Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Browning have a message for us, that they can interpret nature and life in virtue of their Divine gift. Why, then, should we have any doubt when we read such a passage as this from S. Augustine : "I entered the secret chamber of my soul and beheld the light that never changes, above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence. It was altogether different from any earthly illumination. It was above me because it made me, and I was lower because I was made by it"?¹

The vision of Jesus Christ comes and has come to men in different ways and with varying degrees of distinctness. It has not always come to them in its highest form, as a vision of the glorified Jesus ; they have often failed to recognise that the vision which called them to a higher and nobler life, to a life of self-sacrifice and toil, was the vision of the Christ at all. The vision comes to men, for example, at the beginning of their conscious life. The ideal which floats before the schoolboy's mind, and which, in so far as it is true and noble is the beginning of

¹ Dean Inge, "Speculum Animæ," p. 9 f.

the manifestation of the heavenly vision, is often, alas! far higher than the ideal of which he is conscious at any later time. The saddest sight in the whole world is that of the gradual lowering of the standard or ideal of a human life, the gradual development from boyhood to manhood of one whose life's story might be summed up in words the exact opposite to those of S. Paul—I was disobedient to the heavenly vision.

We see first of all the boy with happy, open face, before whose mind there floats the vision, as yet unclouded, of a useful, unselfish life. He loves to picture to himself scenes which, if realised in after-life, would enable him to give expression to the latent possibilities of self-sacrifice and devotion which he feels within him. He reads from time to time of heroic actions, done by men of whom the world was not worthy, and, as he reads, he feels that he has a spirit within him which is akin to theirs, and which might render it possible for him to imitate their actions, and he longs to have the opportunities which were afforded to them. A few years pass by, and too often, as we look again at the same life, we see that a change, slow but unmistakable, is passing over the character, and is revealing itself, at least to some extent, in the outward expression. As the boy has grown older he has allowed thoughts of

selfishness and ambition to rise within his mind, or to be suggested to him by others; the ideal which he sets before him now is no longer a life of unselfish labour for the good of others, but of so-called successful effort to increase the comforts or the riches personal to himself. And though the sight of a noble life, or the hearing of some deed of marvellous courage, still excites within him an involuntary yearning to imitate such, nevertheless the ideal which forms the actual standard of his life is far lower than it once was. Human experience suggests no sight more deserving of the pity of men and of angels than that of a boy born with the capacity for becoming "God's fellow-worker,"¹ but with this capacity gradually destroyed by self-indulgence and the influence of a fashionable home. It is the child of God being gradually transformed into the man of the world! To him :—

Heaven's light hath but revealed a track,
Whereby to crawl away from heaven.²

And as the ideals of his life change the distinctions between good and evil which were once clearly marked tend to become confused. The change which has come over him illustrates the

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 9.

² Lowell, "Extreme Unction".

truth of the Jewish saying : " Commit a sin once and it will not seem to thee a sin ".¹

As we turn to look again at the same life, after the lapse of a few more years, when the selfish thoughts, long harboured within the mind, have had time to produce their natural effect upon the character, it is to see one from whose sight the bright and heavenly vision of early youth has faded, seemingly for ever, to see a man to whom the sight of a noble, unselfish life, lived, it may be, at his very door, has no meaning and bears no message. The sight no longer impels him to attempt any change in his own life, but he is rather repelled by one which differs so greatly from his own, and the motives of which he has lost the power of understanding. In his case the thoughts of selfishness, indulged in so lightly in early youth, have at last become the dominant principles of his life : the world around, which should have been to him the glass through which to see God, has become the mirror in which the dull quicksilver of his own selfishness serves but to reflect back the image of himself.

O glorious Youth, that once was mine !

O high Ideal ! all in vain

Ye enter at this ruined shrine

Whence worship ne'er shall rise again ;

¹ Talmud.

The bat and owl inhabit here,
The snake nests in the altar-stone,
The sacred vessels moulder near,
The image of the God is gone.¹

This earth affords no sadder spectacle than that of the man who has been content to let his life go by without making any serious attempt in later life to realise the heaven-sent vision of early youth. A story is told of an Eastern king who, being one day surrounded by the wisest men in his dominions, propounded to them the question : "What man is most deserving of pity in the world?" Many and various were the answers given. One suggested that he was most deserving of pity who was broken down with calamity and misfortune ; another, he who was suffering from an incurable disease ; yet another, he who was bereft of all friends. After all the rest had given their opinions the grand vizier rose in his place and said : "All these, O king, I deem deserving of our pity ; but him I deem in far worse case who has passed through his life without doing good".

It is not only in early youth, or in the ordinary course of natural development, that the heavenly vision is granted, but there are special occasions in the lives of all when it is revealed with more

¹ Lowell, *id.*

than usual distinctness. It comes, for example, in hours of solitude, of sickness, or of danger. Whether, in the still hours of the night or in some moment of sudden peril, a man has called up before him his whole past life, and has realised how low has been the ideal which he has set before him, how unworthy of comparison it has been with the life of self-sacrifice of which Christ spoke when He said: "He that will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me!" At such a time the vision of the Christ has seemed to beckon him to leave behind his selfish ambitions and pursuits, and to follow in the steps of His own life. Though he may not be able to point to any such crises of thought or action in his life, it is nevertheless true that the vision has been his, even when, perhaps, he was least conscious of its presence. It has become his as the study of Holy Scripture has revealed to him the true ideal of humanity and has enabled him to see as in a mirror the man that God meant him to become.¹ There have been times in the experience of all when, as they have read or heard of some noble action, the

¹ Cf. S. James i. 23, τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ. "The word *γένεσις* is used here to contrast the reflection in the mirror of the face which belongs to this transitory life, with the reflection, as seen in the Word, of the character which is being here moulded for eternity." J. B. Mayor, "Ep. of S. James," p. 68.

thought has sprung up in their minds, indistinct and transient though it may have been, the thought, at times developing into the wish, that they might have the opportunity of imitating such action. That thought, that scarcely felt and unexpressed wish, was the voice of the Divine Spirit speaking within them, bidding them become or do that of which they have thought. Every true, unselfish thought, every desire after that which is good, from whatever source it may appear to come, is part of the vision granted to every man, and the formation and development of his character depends upon his obedience or disobedience to its behests.

This thought finds expression in the words of Bishop Doane :—

Chisel in hand stood a sculptor boy,
With his marble block before him,
And his face lit up with a smile of joy,
As an angel dream passed o'er him.
He carved the dream on the shapeless stone
With many a sharp incision,
In heaven's own light the sculptor stood,
He had caught the angel vision.

Sculptors of life are we, as we stand
With our souls uncarved before us,
Waiting the hour when at God's command
Our life dream passes o'er us.

If we carve it then on the shapeless stone,
With many a sharp incision,
Its heavenly beauties shall be our own,
Our lives that angel vision.

The highest ideal of human life, or, in other words, the vision of the Christ, is presented to men as a life of self-sacrifice. This thought is embodied in the well-known vision attributed to the soldier saint S. Martin of Tours. At one period in his life when he was in doubt and distress and was looking forward to the end of the world, a glorious vision suddenly appeared to him in his cell. A magnificent figure appeared to him in shining robes and with a jewelled crown on his head and gold embroidered shoes on his feet. After a pause the majestic visitor spoke and said : " Martin, recognise him whom thou beholdest. I am Christ. I am about to visit the earth, and it is my pleasure to manifest myself to thee beforehand." When Martin made no reply he continued : " Why dost thou hesitate to believe when thou seest ? I am Christ ; fall down and worship me ! " Thereupon S. Martin, as by a sudden inspiration, answered : " The Lord Jesus did not foretell that He would come arrayed in purple and crowned with a golden crown. I will not believe that Christ has come unless I see Him in the dress and shape in which He

suffered ; unless I see Him bear before my eyes the marks of the Cross." And the vision vanished, and S. Martin knew that he had been tempted of the evil one.

The vision of Jesus Christ which was granted to S. Paul was granted in order to show him how many things he must suffer for His sake. To a life of self-denial and self-discipline, such as was that of S. Paul, the vision of Christ invites those to whom it is granted to-day.

The very clouds which at times interrupt the divine vision may provide the conditions which are indispensable for its interpretation. Astronomers have found by experience that they can obtain information in regard to the nature of the sun on the occasion of an eclipse which they could not learn when nothing intervenes to interrupt their vision. The sun's rays which then seem to encircle the intervening body reveal much concerning the nature of the sun's face of which they would otherwise be ignorant. The experience of the astronomer may help us to interpret the experience of the Christian. When some great sorrow seems for a time to blot God out of his life, and he is enshrouded by sudden darkness, it may well be that the sorrow which seems to conceal the face of God is intended to afford him an opportunity which could

not otherwise become his to learn His true nature.

With whatever degree of distinctness the vision of Jesus Christ has already been granted to any man, it will become more or less distinct as time goes on, according as he heeds or neglects its guidance. For as the very word "disobedient" implies, the vision carries with it a moral obligation. In this respect the heavenly vision differs from all visions of earthly beauty on which it is possible for him to gaze. The mere sight of such does not necessarily bring to him any fresh responsibility, or leave him either better or worse than it found him. But in the case of the heavenly vision the obligation which it entails is one from which it is impossible for him to escape. Every fresh revelation of duty involves a corresponding obligation to translate the vision into action. The effect of S. Paul's vision was to open before him a field of service limited by no dividing lines of race or language nor by any bounds of space or time.

The attitude of every man who has "seen Jesus" ¹ towards the whole world, will be that of S. Paul, who summed up his obligations to Jews, Greeks and Barbarians in the words, "I am debtor" ².

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 1.

² Rom. i. 14.

UNCONDITIONAL SERVICE.

UNCONDITIONAL SERVICE. -

THE first half of the book of Daniel contains a series of stories which were written down by its author in order to encourage his fellow-countrymen in days of trial by assuring them that in hours of utmost peril God would be with them. It does not greatly matter to us whether the date assigned to this book by the old Jewish rabbis was correct, or whether the stories were compiled in later time to teach (as the story of Job was intended to teach), spiritual truths in allegorical form. In either case the teaching and inspiration of the book remain. The third chapter of this book contains the story of the refusal of three Hebrew captives in Babylon to worship the image which the King of Babylon had set up and which they had been commanded to worship on pain of instant death. The crisis of the story is their refusal to obey this command, conveyed to them by the king in person. Standing in the presence of the man who was regarded by his countless subjects as king of the whole world and as the lord of life and death, they announce to

him their intention to disobey his orders, and in answer to his threat of immediate death, they say to him : " Our God . . . will deliver us out of thy hand ". These would have been awe-inspiring words had they stood alone. They would have been equivalent to saying, " we are servants of a King who is mightier than the mightiest of earth's monarchs, and is able to deliver men out of his hand ". When we recall the power and magnificence of the Court at Babylon and the terror which it inspired amongst the surrounding nations we realize how exalted is the courage attributed to these three Hebrew strangers who could declare in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar that they were under the protection of a king whose will was at variance with his own. This declaration would have been grand and noble had it stood alone. But it does not stand alone. It is the prelude to one yet more wonderful and inspiring. They not only announce to Nebuchadnezzar their belief that the God whom they serve is able to deliver them, but they say to him, supposing such deliverance be not granted, even then we will not do that which we believe to be contrary to His will. The words attributed to them are, " If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand,

O king. *But if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Their language is that of uncalculating devotion and of unconditional service.

The ideal of duty which it embodies may be contrasted alike with the earlier teachings of the Israelites and with those of many non-Christian religions. When the Israelites first began to recognise an obligation to serve God, revealed to them as Jehovah, the service which they were prepared to render to Him was conditioned by the thought that this service would promote their own material interests. In the words of one of his patriarchs the Israelite was prepared to say: "If God will be with me, and will keep me . . . and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on . . . then shall Jehovah be my God".¹

The thought that a bargain can be struck with God or with the gods whereby a man may secure divine favour in exchange for works of merit which he has done or engages to do, is common to the Hebrew religion in its earliest forms and to many other of the great religions of the world. In the case of the Israelites it is possible to trace a gradual development from a conditional to an unconditional service and allegiance. The most

¹ Gen. xxviii. 20 f.

discouraging feature of the great Eastern religions is that it is impossible to trace any similar progress in their teachings. The acquisition of merit is the keynote of the teaching of modern Buddhism and bulks largely in the teachings of Hinduism and even of Islam.

Those who have never learnt to look upon God as the embodiment of love, must needs regard Him as a Being to be propitiated by deeds of self-sacrifice or by acts of merit.

The knowledge that God is unconditioned Love begets within a man a sense of his inability to do anything to which the word meritorious can be applied, if that word be used in the sense in which it is used to describe the relations which exist between himself and his fellow-men.

For merit lives from man to man,
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee.¹

The language attributed to the three Hebrew captives is the language of faith as distinguished from that of mere duty.

Duty may be described as devotion to a law, faith as devotion to a lawgiver.

It is not true to say that the deeds which faith has inspired have been nobler or more heroic than those to which duty has given birth. Some

¹ "In Memoriam."

of the noblest deeds in history have been accomplished by those who knew not the meaning of faith in God.

We might take as an illustration the self-sacrifice of the Spartan King Leonidas and his 300 companions at the pass of Thermopylae. The king had been sent forward to hold the pass against the vast armies of the Persian invader. When the pass had been treacherously betrayed to the Persians and an opportunity was offered to Leonidas and his companions to retreat in safety, they indignantly rejected the suggestion, and advancing against their foes were slain to a man, fighting on behalf of their country. What was it that inspired these men to the accomplishment of a deed which has never been surpassed in the history of war? It was not that they expected to secure any benefits for themselves in a future world. Those of them who believed at all in another life looked upon it with dread and misgiving. They were inspired by what is sometimes called the blind instinct of duty which waited not to calculate the future and constrained them to face certain death. We cannot doubt that those who died at Thermopylae, and many another who has since died in the performance of duty, have now learned what the Christian Faith has taught us to believe, that—

The toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining tablelands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.¹

Leonidas and his companions recognised their immediate duty and waited not to consider the consequences which its performance would entail. We doubt not that in the life which awaited them when that duty was accomplished they entered into conscious communion with Him by whose unrecognised inspiration they were enabled to die.

The question arises, If the ideal of duty illustrated by the story of Leonidas and other heroic men is so high, in what respect does the teaching contained in this story of the three Hebrew captives mark an advance upon that to be found in the literature of other peoples to whom our Scriptures are unknown? To them we may apply the words used by Lowell in a somewhat different context :—

Here at least were men
Who meant and did the noblest thing they knew ;
Can our religion cope with deeds like this ? ²

One answer to the question is that the most potent force which can be brought to bear upon the life of any man is personal influence. There

¹ Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington".

² "The Cathedral."

have always been a certain number of heroic souls in all lands for whom the recognition of duty as an abstract law has furnished a motive force sufficient to give birth to high and noble actions, but amongst all peoples, and in all periods of history, their number has been small.

The number is immeasurably greater of those whose lives have been transformed because they have been brought into touch with another human being or with a Divine Being to whom they have learned to attribute the capacity for human sympathy and love.

The unconditional service which the Hebrew captives were prepared to render to Jehovah was based upon a belief that the sacrifice of their lives would be not merely the fulfilment of their duty but a service rendered to a living and sympathetic Being. It is this fact which renders their story fruitful and inspiring, and differentiates it from the stories of heroism and self-sacrifice which are supplied by the histories of all peoples and all religions.

The story of Leonidas and other similar stories appeal to the brave and the patriotic few, but the story of the Hebrew captives (even if it be regarded as an inspired allegory) appeals to those who are conscious of moral weakness but who believe that the almighty and all-loving God of

the Hebrews still lives, and that from Him comes to them the call to render to the claims of duty an unconditional obedience.

It is interesting to notice that the writer of the book of Daniel expressly states that the heroic act of the three Hebrew captives was not the outcome of a sudden impulse, but was the sequel to a life of self-discipline. The book of Daniel opens with the account of their refusal to partake of the luxuries of Babylon and of their resolve to refrain from eating or doing anything which would interfere with a life of devotion to the God of their fathers. The principle illustrated by the story is one of permanent significance. He who would prepare himself for the hour when the call shall come to him to sacrifice his every material interest to the dictates of duty, and who would forestall the possibility of failure when the moment for decision arrives, will strive to make his whole life a life of self-discipline.

Nor deem that acts heroic wait on chance ;
The man's whole life preludes the single deed
That shall decide if his inheritance
Be with the sifted few of matchless breed
Or with the unmotivated herd that only sleep and feed.¹

The demand, and the help afforded for the fulfilment of the demand, of religious duty as con-

¹ Lowell, "Under the Old Elm," vii. 3, 2.

ceived by the Jews, were alike greater than those afforded by any other pre-Christian religion. The demand was for unconditional service, the help afforded was the knowledge that this service would be received and accepted by a God who was in sympathetic touch with human life.

They were a preparation for the revelation of a yet higher demand and yet completer help which were to be given to men by the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, who declared, "if a man hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple," but who declared also, "if ye abide in me and I in you . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you".

He who in accordance with the teaching of this story recognises the obligation to offer to God an unconditional service, will find that in the crises of his life or in the hottest fire of trouble or temptation, the Son of God walks ever by his side.

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